

THE RALSTONS

Paleo-
Relating round
in this
Period



THE RALSTONS

BY

F. MARION CRAWFORD

AUTHOR OF "A ROMAN SINGER," "PIETRO GHISLERI,"
"KATHARINE LAUDERDALE," ETC.



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CHAPTER I.

ALEXANDER LAUDERDALE JUNIOR was very much exercised in spirit concerning the welfare of his two daughters, of whom the elder was Charlotte and the younger was Katharine. Charlotte had been married, nearly two years before the opening of this tale, to Benjamin Slayback, the well-known member of Congress from Nevada, and lived in Washington. Katharine was still at home, living with her father and mother and grandfather, in the old house in Clinton Place, in the city of New York.

Mr. Lauderdale, the son of the still living philanthropist, and the nephew of the latter's younger brother, the great millionaire, Robert Lauderdale, sat in his carefully swept, garnished and polished office on a Saturday morning early in April. In outward appearance, as well as in inward sympathy, he was in perfect harmony with his surroundings. He resembled a magnificent piece of

mechanism exhibited in a splendid show-case—a spare man, extremely well proportioned, with a severe cast of face, hard grey eyes, and a look all over him which recalled a well-kept locomotive. He sat facing the bright light which fell through the clear plate glass. One of his hands, cool, smooth, lean, lay perfectly still, spread out upon the broad sheet of a type-written letter on the table; the other, equally motionless, hung idly over his knee. They were grasping hands, with long, curved nails, naturally highly polished. It was not probable that the great Trust Company, in which Alexander Junior held such an important position, should ever lose the fraction of a fractional interest through any oversight of his.

So far as his own fortune was concerned, he often said that he was poor. He lived in an old house which had been his grandfather's and father's in turn, but which, although his father was alive and continued to live in it, had become his own property some years previous to the beginning of this story. For Alexander Lauderdale Senior was a philanthropist; and although his brother, the rich Robert, gave liberally toward the support of the institutions in which he was interested, Alexander had little by little turned everything he possessed into money, applying it chiefly to the education of idiots. The consequence was that he depended, almost uncon-

sciously, upon his only son for the actual necessities of life. The old house was situated on the north side of Clinton Place, which had never been a fashionable street, though it lay in what had once been a most fashionable neighbourhood. No one need be surprised if the near relatives of such a very rich man as Robert Lauderdale lived very quietly, so far as expenditure was concerned. He was a very generous man, and would have done much more for his nephew and the latter's family if he had believed that they wished or expected it. But in his sensible view, they had all they needed, — a good house, a sufficient amount of luxury, and a very prominent position in society. He knew, moreover, that, however much he might give, the money would either find its way into the vast charities in which his brother was interested, or would disappear, as other sums and bits of property had disappeared before now, to some place — presumably one of safety — of which his nephew never spoke. For he suspected that Alexander Junior was not nearly so poor as he represented himself to be, and he was not exactly pleased with the fact that he himself was the only person before whom Alexander Junior bowed down and offered incense.

For this younger Lauderdale was a very rigid man in almost all respects: in his religion, which took the Presbyterian form, and took it in earnest;

in his uprightness, which was cruelly sincere; and in his outward manner, which was in the highest degree conventionally correct.

It was this extreme correctness which lay at the root of his present troubles, since, in his opinion, both his daughters had departed from it in opposite directions and in an almost equal degree. He did not recognize himself in either of them, and, as he believed his own character to be an excellent model for his family, his vanity was wounded by nature's perverseness. Furthermore, he distinctly disliked that sort of social prominence which is the portion of those who are not like the majority, or who do not think with the majority and say so. Both Mrs. Slayback and Miss Lauderdale attracted attention in that way.

Mrs. Slayback was handsome and vain, and believed herself to be proud in the better sense of the word. She had married her husband for two reasons: because she found the paternal home intolerable, and because, besides being rich, Benjamin Slayback was thought to be a man who had a brilliant future before him in the world of politics. Charlotte had believed that she could rule him, and herself become a power. In this she had been disappointed at the outset, having been deceived by a certain almost childlike simplicity of exterior, which was in reality one of Slayback's strongest weapons. He admired her very much;

he looked up to her with admiration for her superior social acquirements, and he treated her with a sort of barbaric liberality to which she had not been accustomed. But within himself he followed his own political devices without consulting her, and with a smiling reticence which convinced her most unpleasantly that she was not intellectually a match for him. This was all the more painful as she considered him to be her social inferior, a point of view which was popular with some of her intimate friends in New York, but much less so in Washington, and not at all in Nevada.

The immediate consequence of this state of affairs was that Charlotte and her husband did not agree. Both were disappointed, though in an unequal measure. Slayback claimed that any woman should be contented who had what he gave his wife. Charlotte thought that she showed great forbearance in not leaving a man whom she could not rule. It was not worth while, she said to herself, to have accepted a man who had, at her first acquaintance with him, worn a green tie; whose speech at home was remarkable rather for its ‘burr’ than for its grammar, and who did queer things with his knife and fork—unless his undeniable intelligence and force were to be at her service in such a way as to make her feel that she was at least as powerful a person as he. She had condemned the green tie, and he had sub-

mitted, and she had successfully conveyed hints against cutting fish and potatoes with a steel knife; but in the matter of grammar she had been less successful. When Benjamin was on his legs on the floor of the House, as he often was, he could speak very well indeed, which made it all the more unpleasant when he relapsed into the use of dialect, not to say slang, at his own table. He was a jovial man over his dinner, too, and she particularly detested jovial men, especially when they spoke English not altogether correctly. She had vaguely hoped that Benjamin would be spoken of as Mrs. Slayback's husband, but it had turned out that, in spite of her beauty and brilliant conversation, she was spoken of as Benjamin Slayback's wife. By way of outshining him, she had conceived the plan of outshining everybody else in matters of fashion and fashionable eccentricity. She had spoken to more than one member of the family of obtaining a divorce on the ground of incompatibility of temper, which, she said, could be managed in Nevada, since New York was so absurdly strict about divorcees. It was evidently within the bounds of the possible that she might have spoken in this sense to friends who were not related to her, as her father knew. Altogether, he was aware that she was talked of and he suspected that she was laughed at. She had been seen to smoke cigarettes, it was reported that she had

driven four-in-hand, and Alexander would have been less surprised than shocked if he had heard that she played poker with her intimates and bet on horse-races.

It was hard that such a man should have such a daughter, he thought, and that all this should be the result of so much careful and highly correct training and education. It was harder still that his younger child should be as completely out of sympathy with him as her elder sister, especially as Katharine outwardly resembled him, at least a little, whereas Charlotte had inherited her fair complexion from her mother.

Of the two, Katharine was the more difficult to deal with, and he was glad that her peculiarities were mental rather than outwardly manifested in her behaviour, as her sister's were. But of their kind, they were strong and caused him great anxiety. There was a mystery about her thoughts, too, which he could not fathom, and which influenced her conduct, as though she had some secret motive for some of her actions and for many of her opinions, which might, perhaps, have explained both, but which she was not willing to divulge. Katharine held views upon religion which were of the most disquieting character, and Katharine flatly refused to speak of being married. These were Alexander Junior's principal grievances against her.

So far as the second of these was concerned, he

might have found plenty of excuse for her, had he sought it, in his own character. Whatever his faults might be, he had been a very faithful man. He had married Emma Camperdown, the famous beauty from Kentucky, when they had both been very young, and he had loved her all his life, in spite of the fact that she was a Roman Catholic and he a very puritanically inclined Presbyterian of the older school. Love that will bear the strain of religious differences, when religious conviction exists on both sides, must be of a very robust nature, and Alexander's had borne it for a quarter of a century. It was true that his wife, who had been born a Catholic, was not aggressively devout; but in his view of the matter, her errors were mortal ones, and the thought of her probable fate in a future existence had really saddened the hard man's life. But it had not diminished nor shaken his love. About that, there was nothing romantic, nor Quixotie, nor emotional. It had none of the fine, outward qualities which often belong abundantly to transient passions. There was in it a good deal of the sense of property, which was very clearly defined with him, and he lacked in most ways the delicacies and tendernesses which are the rarest and most beautiful ornaments of the strong. But such as it was, its endurance and good faith were unquestionable. Indeed, endurance and uprightness were Alexander's principal virtues. Both

were genuine, and both were so remarkable as to raise him high in the respect of his fellow-men. If he had secrets, he had a right to keep them, for they concerned nobody but himself, and he was naturally reticent.

Katharine had some similar qualities. She had loved her distant cousin, John Ralston, a long time, and she was as faithful and enduring as her father. Ralston loved her quite as dearly and truly, but Alexander Junior would not have him for a son-in-law, and had told him so in an exceedingly plain and forcible manner. His objection was that Ralston seemed unable to do anything for himself, and had, moreover, acquired a reputation for being fast and dissipated. He was not rich, either. His father, Admiral Ralston, had been dead several years, and John lived with his mother on twelve thousand a year. The young man had made two attempts at steady work and was now making his third, the previous ones having resulted in his leaving the lawyer's office in which he had placed himself, at the end of three months, and the great banking establishment of Beman Brothers, in Broad Street, after a trial of only six weeks. He had now gone back to Beman's, having been readmitted as an especial favour to Mr. Robert Lauderdale, with no salary and with an unlimited period of probation before him. He was a popular young fellow enough, but he was not what is called a promising

youth, though his ways had improved considerably during the last few months. Mr. Beman said that he came regularly to the bank and seemed disposed to work, but that his ignorance of business was something phenomenal. Nevertheless, to please old Robert the Rich, John Ralston was tolerated, so long as he behaved himself properly.

And Katharine loved him, in spite of her father's disapproval and her mother's good advice. For during the preceding winter Mrs. Lauderdale, who had once favoured the match, had gone over to the enemy, and showed a very great and almost unbecoming anxiety to see Katharine married. Hamilton Bright, another distant relative and the junior partner of Beman Brothers, would have married her at any moment, and he was a very desirable man. The fact that he was a relative was in his favour, too, for both he and Katharine would probably in the end inherit a share of the enormous Lauderdale fortune, and it would be as well that the money should not go out of the family. Robert Lauderdale had never married, and was now well over seventy years of age, though his strength had not as yet come to labour and sorrow.

Katharine did not talk of John Ralston. Especially of late, she avoided saying anything about him. But she would look at no one else, though she had no lack of suitors besides Hamilton Bright, and in spite of her reticence it was easy to see that her

feelings towards Ralston had not undergone any change. Once, during the preceding winter, Alexander had been visited by a ray of hope. Ralston had been reported by the newspapers as having got into a bad scrape, winding up with an encounter with a pugilist, and ending in his being brought home by policemen in the middle of the night. It had actually been said that he had been the worse for too much champagne, and during a few hours Mr. Lauderdale had hoped that Katharine would be disgusted and would give him up. But it turned out to have been all a mistake. No less a personage than the celebrated Doctor Routh had at once written to the papers, stating that he had attended John Ralston when he had been brought home, that he had met with an accident, and that the current statements about his condition were utterly false and libellous. And there the matter had ended. Alexander might congratulate himself upon having got the alliance of his wife against John, but their united efforts to move their daughter had proved as fruitless as his own had been when unassisted.

There was nothing for it but to wait patiently, and to hope that she might forget her cousin in the course of time. Meanwhile, another anxiety presented itself, almost as serious, in her father's opinion. She had been brought up as a Presbyterian, like her sister, in accordance with his wishes,

and in this respect Mrs. Lauderdale had been conscientious, though her antagonism to her husband's church was deep-seated and abiding. But of late Katharine had begun to express very dangerous and subversive opinions in regard to things in general and in respect of religion in particular. Her mind seemed to have reached its growth and to have entered upon its development. Katharine was going astray after strange new doctrines, Alexander thought, and he did not like the savour of mysticism in the fragments of her conversation which he occasionally overheard. Though he could not with equanimity bear to hear any one deny the existence of the soul, he disliked almost more to hear it spoken of as though humanity could have anything to do with it directly, beyond believing in its presence and future destiny. Whether this was due to the form of the traditions in which he had been brought up, or was the result of his own exceedingly vague beliefs in regard to the soul's nature, it is of no use to enquire. The fact was the same in its consequences. He was very much disturbed about Katharine's views, as he called them, and at the same time he was conscious for the first time in his life that no confidence existed between her and him, and that their spheres of thought on all subjects were separated by a blank and impenetrable wall.

Then, too, Katharine had of late shown a strong

predilection for the society of Paul Griggs, a man of letters and of considerable reputation, who was said to have strange views upon many subjects, who had lived in many countries, and who had about him something half mysterious, which offended the commonplace respectability of Alexander Lauderdale's character. Not that Alexander thought himself commonplace, and as for his respectability, it was of the solid kind which the world calls social position, and which such people themselves secretly look upon as the proud inheritance of an ancient and honourable family. Everything that Paul Griggs said jarred unpleasantly on Alexander Lauderdale's single but sensitive string, which was his conservatism.

Griggs disclaimed ever having had anything to do with modern Buddhism, for instance. But he had somehow got the reputation of being what people call a Buddhist when they know nothing of Buddha. As a matter of fact, he happened to be a Roman Catholic. But Mr. Lauderdale had heard him use expressions which had fixed the popular impression in his mind. The conversation of such a man could not be good for an impressionable girl like Katharine, he thought. He took it for granted that Katharine was impressionable because she was a girl and young. Mr. Griggs said very paradoxical things sometimes, and Katharine quoted them afterwards. Mr. Lauderdale hated paradox

as he hated everything which was in direct opposition to generally received opinion. It was most disagreeable to him to hear that there was no such thing as a future, as distinguished from past or present, when so much of his private meditation had for its object the definition of the future state for himself and others. He did not like Mr. Griggs' way of referring to the popular idea of the Supreme Being as a 'magnified, non-natural man' — and when Griggs quoted Dante's opinion in the matter, Alexander Lauderdale set down Dante Alighieri as an insignificant agnostic, which was unjust, and branded Mr. Griggs as another, which was an exaggeration. Now, whatever the truth might be, he considered that Katharine was in great danger, and that although Providence was necessarily just, it might have shown more kindness and discretion in selecting the olive branches it had vouchsafed to him.

It need hardly be said that of the two extremes to which his daughters seemed inclined to go, he preferred the one chosen by Katharine. That, at least, gave no open offence. Morally, it was worse to dissect the traditional soul as it had been handed down in its accepted form through many generations of religious men, than to smoke a cigarette after a dinner party. But in practice, the effect of the cigarette upon the opinion of society was out of all proportion greater, and Charlotte was there-

fore worse than Katharine, as a daughter, though she might not be so bad when looked upon as a subject for potential salvation.

All this disturbed Alexander Lauderdale very much, for he saw no immediate prospect of any improvement in the condition of things. For once in his life his daughters were almost his chief preoccupation. If he had been subject to absence of mind, something might, perhaps, have got out of order in the minute details of the Trust Company's working. In that respect, however, he was superior to circumstances. But when he was momentarily idle, his mind reverted to its accustomed channels, and the problem regarding the future of his daughters got into the way and upset his financial calculations, and made him really unhappy. For his financial calculations were apparently of a nature which made them pleasant to contemplate, although he declared himself to be so very poor.

On that particular Saturday morning he was interrupted in his solitude by the sudden appearance of his wife. It was not often that she had entered his office during the ten years since he had been installed in it, and he was so much surprised by her coming that he positively started, and half rose out of his chair.

Mrs. Lauderdale was a beautiful woman still, and would be beautiful if she lived to extreme old age. But she was already past the period up to

which a woman may hope to preserve the freshness of a late youth. The certainty that her beauty was waning had come over her very suddenly on a winter's evening not long ago, when she had noticed that the man who was talking to her looked persistently at Katharine instead of at herself; and just then, catching sight of her face in a mirror, and being tired at the time, she had realized that she was no longer supreme. It had been a bitter moment, and had left a wound never to be healed. The perfect, classic features, the beautiful blue eyes, the fair waving hair, were all present still. Her tall figure was upright and active, and she had no tendency to grow stout or heavy. She had many reasons for congratulating herself, but the magic halo was gone, and she knew it. Some women never find it out until they are really old, and they suffer less.

At the present moment, as she entered her husband's office, it would have been hard to believe that Mrs. Lauderdale could be more than five and thirty years of age. The dark coat she wore showed her figure well, and her thin veil separated and hid away the imperfections of what had once been perfect. She was a little agitated, too, and the colour was in her cheeks — a trifle too much of it, perhaps, but softened to the delicacy of a peach blossom by the dark gauze.

She paused a moment as she closed the door

behind her, glancing first at her husband, and then looking about the unfamiliar room, to satisfy herself that they were alone.

"This is an unexpected pleasure, Emma," said Alexander Junior, rising definitely and coming to meet her.

"Yes," answered Mrs. Lauderdale. "I don't often come, do I? I know you don't like to be disturbed. But as this is Saturday, and I knew you would be coming up town early, I thought you wouldn't mind. It's rather important."

"I trust nothing bad has happened," observed Alexander, drawing up a chair for her.

"Bad? Well—I don't know. Yes—of course it is! It's serious, at all events. Uncle Robert's dying. I thought you ought to know—"

"Dying? Uncle Robert?"

Alexander Lauderdale's metallic voice rang through the room, and his smooth, lean hands grasped the arms of his chair.

An instant later he looked a little nervously at the door, as though hoping that no one had heard his words, nor the tone in which he had spoken them. A dark flush rose in his face and the veins at his temple swelled suddenly, while his grip on the chair seemed to tighten, and he turned his eyes on his wife.

"Dying!" he repeated in a low voice. "What has happened to him? When did you hear of this?"

Mrs. Lauderdale had not expected him to show so much feeling. She, herself, was far from calm, however, and did not notice his extreme agitation as though it were anything unnatural.

"Doctor Routh came to tell me," she answered. "He's been there all the morning—and as there was time before luncheon, I thought I'd come—"

"But what's the matter with the old gentleman? This is very surprising news—very sad news, Emma."

A rather spasmodic, electric smile had momentarily appeared on Alexander Lauderdale's face, disappearing again instantly, as he uttered the last words.

"I'm very much overcome by this news," he added, after a short hesitation.

He did not appear to be so deeply grieved as he said that he was, but the words were appropriate, and Mrs. Lauderdale recognized the fact at once.

"It will make a great difference," she said.

"Yes, I should say so. I should say so," repeated Alexander Junior, not with emphasis, but slowly and thoughtfully. "However," he continued, suddenly, "we mustn't count—I mean—yes—we—we mustn't altogether place our confidence in man—though Doctor Routh certainly stands at the head of his profession. It's our duty to see that other physicians are called in consultation. We must do our utmost to help. Indeed—it

might have been wiser if you had gone there at once and had sent a messenger for me, instead of coming here. But — yes — you haven't told me what the matter is, my dear. Is it — anything in the nature of apoplexy — or the heart — you know? At his age, people rarely — but, of course, while there's life, there's hope. We mustn't forget that."

He seemed unable to wait for his wife's answer to his questions.

"Why, no, my dear," she replied. "You know he's not been very well for some days. He's worse — that's all. It was nothing but a cold at first, but it's turned into pneumonia."

"Pneumonia? Dear me! At his age, people rarely live through it — however, he's very strong, of course. Difference!" he exclaimed, softly. "Yes — a great difference. It — it will make a great gap in the family, Emma. We're all so fond of him, and I'm deeply attached to him, for my part. As for my poor father, he will be quite overcome. I hope he has not been told yet."

"No — I thought I'd wait and see you first."

"Quite right, my dear — quite right — very wise. In the meantime, I think we should be going. Yes — it's just as well that you didn't take off your hat."

He rose as he spoke, and touched one of the row of electric buttons on his desk. A man in the liv-

ery of the Company appeared at the door, just as Alexander was taking up his overcoat.

"I'm going up town a little earlier than usual, Donald," he said. "Inform Mr. Arbuckle. If anything unusual should occur, send to Mr. Harrison Beman."

"Yes, sir."

"That's all, Donald."

The man faced about and left the office, having stood still for several seconds, staring at Alexander. Donald had been twenty years in the Company's service, and did not remember that Mr. Lauderdale had ever left the office before hours in all the ten years since he had been chief, nor in the preceding ten during which he had occupied more or less subordinate positions.

Mrs. Lauderdale daintily pulled down her veil and pulled up her gloves, shook out her frock a little and looked at the points of her shoes, then straightened her tall figure and stood ready. Alexander had slipped on his coat, and was smoothing his hat with a silk handkerchief which he always carried about him for that purpose. He had discovered that it made the hat last longer. Both he and his wife had unconsciously assumed that indescribable air which people put on when they are about to go to church.

"We'll take the Third Avenue Elevated," said Mr. Lauderdale. "It's shorter for us."

Robert Lauderdale's house was close to the Park. The pair went out together into Broad Street, and the people stared at them as they threaded their way through the crowd. They were a handsome and striking couple, well contrasted, the dark man, just turning grey, and the fair woman, still as fair as ever. It might even be said that there was something imposing in their appearance. They had that look of unaffectedly conscious superiority which those who most dislike it most strenuously endeavour to imitate. Moreover, when a lady, of even passably good looks, appears down town between eleven and twelve o'clock in the morning, she is certain to be stared at. Very soon, however, the Lauderdales had left the busiest part of the multitude behind them. They walked quickly, with a preoccupied manner, exchanging a few words from time to time. Lauderdale was gradually recovering from his first surprise.

"Did Routh say that there was no hope?" he asked, as they paused at a crossing.

"No," answered Mrs. Lauderdale. "He didn't say that. He said that uncle Robert's condition caused him grave anxiety. Those were his very words. You know how he speaks when a thing is serious. He said he thought that we all ought to know it."

"Of course—of course. Very proper. We should be the first, I'm sure."

It would not be fair, perhaps, to say that Alexander's voice expressed disappointment. But he spoke very coldly and his lips closed mechanically, like a trap, after his words. They went on a little further. Then Mrs. Lauderdale spoke, with some hesitation.

"Alexander — I suppose you don't know exactly — do you?" She turned and looked at his face as she walked.

"About what?" he asked, glancing at her and then looking on before him again.

"Well — you know — about the will —"

"My dear, what a very foolish question!" answered Alexander, with some emphasis. "We have often talked about it. How in the world should I know any better than any one else? Uncle Robert is a secretive man. He never told me anything."

"Because there are the Ralstons, you know," pursued Mrs. Lauderdale. "After all, they're just as near as you are, in the way of relationship."

"My father is the elder — older than uncle Robert," said Alexander. "Katharine Ralston's father was the youngest of the three."

"Does that make a difference?" asked Mrs. Lauderdale.

"It ought to!" Alexander answered, energetically.

CHAPTER II.

"I'M not dying, I tell you! Don't bother me, Routh!"

Robert Lauderdale turned impatiently on his side as he spoke, and pointed to a chair with one of his big, old hands. Doctor Routh, an immensely tall, elderly man, with a long grey beard and violet blue eyes, laughed a little under his breath, and sat down.

"I'm not at all sure that you are going to die," he said, pleasantly.

"That's a comfort, at all events," answered the sick man, in a husky voice, but quite distinctly. "What the deuce made you say I was going to die, if I wasn't?"

"Some people are stronger than others," answered the doctor.

"I used to be, when I was a boy."

"It won't do you any good to talk. If you can't keep quiet, I shall have to go away."

"All right. I say — mayn't I smoke?"

"No. Positively not."

Doctor Routh smiled again; for he considered it a hopeful sign that the old man should have a dis-

tinct taste for anything, considering how ill he had been. A long silence followed, during which the two looked at one another occasionally. Lauderdale was twenty years older than the doctor, who was the friend, as well as the physician, of all the Lauderdale tribe — with one or two exceptions.

The room was larger and higher than most bed-rooms in New York, but it was simply furnished, and there was very little which could be properly considered as ornamental. Everything which was of wood was of white pear, and the curtains were of plain white velvet, without trimmings. Such metal work as was visible was of steel. There was a large white Persian carpet in the middle of the room, and two or three skins of Persian sheep served for rugs. Robert Lauderdale loved light and whiteness, a strange fancy for so old a man; but the room was in harmony with his personality, and, to some extent, with his appearance. The colour was all gone from his face, his blue eyes were sunken and his cheeks were hollow, but his hair, once red, looked sandy by contrast with the snow-white stuffs, and his beard had beautiful, pale, smoke-coloured shadows in it, like clouded meerschaum. It was not surprising that Routh should have believed him, and believed him still, to be in very great danger. Nevertheless, there was strength in him yet, and if he recovered he might last a few years longer. He breathed

rather painfully, and moved uneasily from time to time, as though trying to find a position in which he could draw breath with less effort. Routh sat motionless by his bedside in the white stillness.

"What's the name of that fellow who's written a book?" asked the sick man, suddenly.

"What book?" enquired the doctor.

"Novel — about the social question — don't you know? There's an old chap in it who has money — something like me."

"Oh! I know. Griggs — that's the man's name."

"What is Griggs, anyway?" asked Robert Lauderdale, in the hoarse growl which served him for a voice at present.

"Griggs? He's what they call a man of letters, or a literary man, or a novelist, or a genius, or a humbug. I've always known him a little, though he's younger than I am. The only good thing I know about him is that he works hard. Now don't talk. It isn't good for you."

"Well — you talk, then. I'll listen," grumbled old Lauderdale.

Thereupon both relapsed into silence, Doctor Routh being one of those people who cannot make conversation to order. Indeed, he was a taciturn man at most times. Lauderdale watched him, coughed a little and turned uneasily, but made a sign to him that he wanted no help.

"Why don't you talk?" he enquired, at last.

"About Griggs? I haven't read but one or two of his books. I don't know what to say about him."

"Do you think he's a dangerous friend for a young girl, Routh?"

"Griggs?" Routh laughed in his grey beard. "Hardly! He's as ugly as a camel, to begin with — and he's getting on. Griggs — why, Griggs must be fifty, at least. Did you never see him? He's been about all the spring — came back from the Caucasus in January or February. What put it into your head that he would be a dangerous acquaintance for a young woman?"

"I don't mean his looks — I mean his ideas."

"Stuff!" ejaculated Doctor Routh. "He's only got the modern mania for psychology. What harm can that do?"

"Is that all? Alexander's an ass."

Robert Lauderdale turned his head away as though he had settled the question which had tormented him. Again there was a silence in the room. The doctor looked at his patient with a rather inscrutable expression, then took out his watch, replaced it, and consulted his pocket-book. At last he rose and walked toward the window noiselessly on the thick, white carpet.

"I shall have to be going," he said. "I've got a consultation. Cheever's downstairs."

Doctor Cheever was Doctor Routh's assistant, who did not leave the house during Mr. Lauderdale's illness.

"And you can send away the undertaker, if he's waiting," growled the sick man, with an attempt at a laugh. "I say—can I see people, if they call? I suppose my nephews and nieces will be here before long."

"It's no use to tell you what to do. You'll do just what you please, anyway. Professionally, I tell you to keep quiet, not to talk, and to sleep if you can. You're not like other people," added Routh, thoughtfully.

"Why not?"

"Most men in your position are badly scared when it comes to going out. The efforts they make to save themselves sometimes kill them. You seem rather indifferent about it. Yet you have a good deal to leave behind you."

"H'm—I've had it all—and a long time. But I want to see Katharine Lauderdale, if she comes."

"I'll send for her if it's anything important," said Doctor Routh, promptly.

The sick man looked quickly at him. It seemed as though his readiness to send for Katharine implied some doubts as to his patient's safety.

"I don't believe I'm going to die," he said, slowly. "What are my chances, Routh? It's your duty to tell me, if you know."

"I don't know. If I did, I'd tell you. You're a very sick man—and they'll all want to see you, of course. I—well, I don't mean to say anything

disagreeable about them. On the contrary — it is natural that they should take an interest — ”

“ Devilish natural,” answered old Lauderdale, with the noise that represented a laugh. “ But I want to see Katharine.”

“ Very well. Then see her. But don’t talk too much. That’s one reason why I’m going now. You can’t keep quiet for five minutes while I’m in the room. Good-bye. I’ll be back in the afternoon, sometime. If you feel any worse, send for me. Cheever will come and look at you now and then — he won’t talk, and he’ll call me up at my telephone station, if I’m wanted.”

“ Well — if you think it’s touch and go, send for Katharine — I mean Katharine Lauderdale, not Katharine Ralston. If you think I’m all right, then leave her alone. She’s not the kind to come of her own accord.”

“ All right.”

Doctor Routh held his old friend’s hand for a moment, and then went away. He exchanged a few words with the nurse, who sat reading in the next room, and then slowly descended the stairs. He was considering and weighing the chances of life and death, and trying to make up his mind as to whether he should send for Robert Lauderdale’s grand-niece or not. It was rather a difficult question to solve, for he knew that if Katharine appeared, the sick man would take her coming for a

sign that his condition was desperate, and the impression might do him harm. On the other hand, though he was so strong and believed so firmly that he was to live, there was more than a possibility that he might die that night. With old people, the heart sometimes fails very suddenly. And Routh could not tell but that his patient's wish to see the girl might proceed from some intention on his part which should produce a permanent effect upon her welfare. It would be very hard on her not to send for her, if her appearance in the sick-room were to be of any advantage to her in future.

It was natural enough that he should ultimately decide the matter in Katharine's favour, for he liked her and Mrs. Ralston best of all the family, next to old Robert himself. Before he left the house he went into the library, which was on the ground floor, to speak with his assistant, Doctor Cheever, whom he had not yet seen, and who had spent the night in the house. The latter gave him an account of the patient's condition during the last twelve hours, which recalled at once the discouragement Doctor Routh had at first felt that morning. Once out of the old man's presence, the personal impression of his strength was less vivid, and the danger seemed to be proportionately magnified, even in the mind of such an experienced physician. Doctor Routh had also more than once experienced

the painful consequences of having omitted, out of sheer hopefulness, to warn people of a dying relation's peril, and he at once decided to go to the Lauderdales himself and tell them what he thought of the case.

He drove down to Clinton Place, and, as luck would have it, he met Katharine just coming out of the house alone. He explained the matter in half a dozen words, put her into his own carriage and sent her to Robert Lauderdale at once, telling the coachman to come back for him. Then he went in and saw Mrs. Lauderdale, and told her all that was occurring. She at once asked him so many questions and required such clear answers, that he forgot to say anything about his meeting with Katharine on the doorstep. As has been seen, he was no sooner gone than Mrs. Lauderdale went down town to speak to her husband. Before Doctor Routh had left Clinton Place, Katharine was sitting at old Robert Lauderdale's bedside.

Many people said that Katharine had never been so beautiful as she was that year. It is possible that as her mother's loveliness began to fade, her own suffered less from the comparison, for her mother had been supreme in her way. But Katharine was a great contrast to her. Katharine had her father's regular features, and his natural, healthy pallor, and her eyes were grey like his. But there the resemblance ceased. Where her

father's face was hard as a medal engraved in steel, hers was soft and delicate as moulded moonlight. Instead of his even, steel-trap mouth, she had lips of that indescribable hue which is only found with dark complexions — not rosy red, nor exactly salmon-pink, and yet with something of the colouring of both, and a tone of its own besides. Her black hair made no ringlets on her forehead, and she did not torture it against its nature. It separated in broad, natural waves, and she wore it as it chose to grow. She had broad, black eyebrows. They make even a meek face look strong, and in strong faces they give a stronger power of expression, and under certain conditions can lend both tenderness and pathos to the eyes they overshadow.

In figure, Katharine was tall and strong, well-grown, neither slight nor heavy. In this, too, she was like her father, who had been an athlete in his day, and still, at fifty years, was a splendid specimen of manhood, though he was growing thinner and smaller than he had been. His daughter moved like him, deliberately, with that grace which is the result of good proportion and easily applied strength, direct and unconscious of effort. Katharine may, perhaps, have been aware of her advantages in this respect. At all events, she dressed so simply that the colour and material of what she wore never attracted a stranger's eye so soon as

her figure and presence. Then he might discover that her frock was of plain grey homespun, exceedingly well made, indeed, but quite without superfluity in the way of ornament.

Long-limbed, easy and graceful as a thoroughbred, she entered the white room and stooped down to kiss the old man's pale forehead. His sunken blue eyes looked up at her as his hand sought hers, and she was shocked at the change in his appearance. She sat down, still holding his hand, and leaned back, looking at him.

"You've been very ill, uncle Robert," she said, softly. "I'm so glad you're better."

"Did Routh tell you I was better?" asked the old man, and his gruff, hoarse voice startled Katharine a little.

"Not exactly getting well—but well enough to see people," she answered. "That's a good deal, you know."

"I should want to see you, even if I were dying," said Robert Lauderdale, pressing her hand with his great fingers.

"Thank you, uncle dear! A lover couldn't say it more prettily." She smiled and returned the pressure.

"Jack Ralston could—for your ears, my dear."

"Ah—Jack—perhaps!"

A very gentle shadow seemed to descend upon Katharine's face, veiling her heart's thoughts and

hiding her real expression, though she did not turn her eyes away from the old man. A short silence followed.

"I hear that Jack is doing very well," he said, at last. "Jack's a good fellow at heart, Katharine. I think he's forgiven me for what happened last winter. I was angry, you know—and he looked very wild."

"He's forgotten all about it, I'm sure. He never speaks of it now. I think he only mentioned it once after it happened, when he explained everything to me. Don't imagine that he bears you any malice. Besides—after all you've done—"

"I've done nothing for him, because he won't let me," growled Robert Lauderdale, and a discontented look came into his face. "But I'm glad he's doing well—I'm very glad."

"It's slow, of course," said Katharine, thoughtfully. "It will be long before he can hope to be a partner."

"Not so long as you think, child. I've been very ill, and I am very ill. I may be dead to-morrow."

"Don't talk like that! So may I, or anybody—by an accident in the street?"

"No, no! I'm in earnest. Not that I care much, I think. It's time to be going, and I've had my share—and the share of many others, I'm afraid. Never mind. Never mind—we won't talk of it any more. You're so young. It makes you sad."

Again the two exchanged a little pressure of hands, and there was silence.

"It will be different when the money is divided," said old Lauderdale, at last. "You'll have to acknowledge your marriage then."

Katharine started slightly. She had her back to the windows, but the whiteness of everything in the room threw reflected light into her face, and the blush that very rarely came spread all over it in an instant.

Only four living persons knew that she had been secretly married to John Ralston during the winter; namely, John and herself, the clergyman who had married them, and Robert Lauderdale. At that time she had with great difficulty persuaded John to go through the ceremony, hoping thereby to force her uncle into finding her husband some congenial occupation in the West. Half an hour after taking the decisive step, she had come to Robert Lauderdale with her story, and he had demonstrated to her that John's only path to success lay through the office of a banker or a lawyer, and John had then returned to Beman Brothers, after refusing to accept a large sum of money, with which old Lauderdale had proposed to make him independent. He had not been willing to give his uncle the smallest chance of thinking that he had married Katharine as a begging speculator, nor had the old gentleman succeeded in

making him change his mind since then. Nor had he referred to the marriage when speaking with Katharine, except on one or two occasions, when it had seemed absolutely necessary to do so. And now that he had spoken of it, he saw the burning blush and did not understand it. Women had entered little into his long life. He fancied that he had hurt her, and was very sorry. The great hand closed slowly, as though with an effort, upon the white young fingers.

"I didn't mean to pain you, my dear; forgive me," he said, simply.

Katharine looked at him with a little surprise, and the blush instantly disappeared. Then she laughed softly and bent forward with a quick movement.

"You didn't, uncle dear! You didn't pain me in the least. It's only—sometimes I don't quite realize that I'm Jack's wife. When I do—like that, just now—it makes me happy. That's all."

Robert Lauderdale looked at her, tried to understand, failed, and nodded his big head kindly but vacantly.

"Well—I'm glad," he said. "But you see, my dear child, when John's a rich man, you can acknowledge your marriage, and have a house of your own. You really must, and of course you will. John can't refuse to take his share. We never quarrelled, that I know of, but that once, last win-

ter, and you say he has forgotten that. Has he? Are you quite sure?"

Katharine nodded quickly and a whispered 'yes' just parted her fresh lips. In her eyes there was a gentle, almost entreating look, as though she besought him to believe her.

"Well," he said, and he spoke very slowly—"well—I'm glad. He can't refuse to take his share when I'm dead and gone—his fair share and no more." He paused for some seconds. "Katharine," he said, very earnestly, at last, "there's a great deal of money to be divided amongst you all. Many of them want it. They'll all have some—perhaps more than they expect. There's a great deal of money, child."

"Yes, I know there is," answered Katharine, quietly.

"When I'm gone they'll say that the old man was richer than they thought he was. I can hear them—I've heard it so often about other men! 'Just guess how much old Bob Lauderdale left,' they'll say. 'Nearly eighty-two millions! Who'd have thought it!' That's what the men will be saying to each other. Eighty millions is a vast amount of money, child. You can't guess how much it is."

"Eighty millions." Katharine repeated the stupendous words softly, as though trying to realize their meaning.

"No—you can't understand." The old man's eyes closed wearily. A few moments later they opened again, and he smiled at her.

"How did you ever manage to make so much?" she asked, smiling, too, and with a look of wonder.

"I don't know," answered the great millionaire, as simply as a child. "I worked hard at first, and I saved small things for a purpose. My father was rich—in those days. He left us each a hundred and fifty thousand dollars. Your uncle Alexander gave it to the poor—as much of it as the poor did not take without asking his leave. Ralph spent some of it, and left the rest to Katharine Ralston when he was killed in the war. I saved mine. It seemed good to have money. And then it came—it came—somehow. I was lucky—fortunate investments in land. I ran after it till I was forty-five; then it began to run after me, and it's outrun me, every time. But I wasn't a miser, Katharine. I don't want you to think that I was mean and miserly when I was young. You don't, do you, my dear?"

"No, indeed!" Katharine gave the answer readily enough. "But, uncle Robert, aren't you talking too much? Doctor Routh said you were not to—that it might hurt you. And your voice is so hoarse! I am sure it can't be good for you."

The old man patted her hand laboriously, for he was very weak.

"I want my talk out," he said. "It doesn't matter much whether it hurts me. A year or two, more or less, when I've had it all, everything, and so long. I'm tired, my child, though when I am well I look so strong. It isn't only strength that's needed to live with. It takes more."

"But there are other things — there is so much in your life — so many people. There are all of us. Don't you care to live for our sakes — just a little, uncle?"

"If they were all like you — more like you — well, I might. I'm very fond of you, Katharine. You know it, don't you? Yes. That's why I sent for you. I don't believe I'm going to die — I told Routh so half an hour ago. But I might — I may. I didn't want to go over without having had my talk out with you. That's it. I want to have my talk out with you. I should be sorry to slip away without seeing you. There are things — things that come into my head when I'm alone — and I've been alone a great deal in my life. Oh, I could have married, if I had liked. Queens would have married me — queer, little, divorced queens from out-of-the-way little kingdoms, you know. But I didn't want to be married for my money, and there were no Katharine Lauderdales when I was young."

Again, with an unsteady, laboured movement, the old hand caressed the young one as it lay on

the soft, white, knitted Shetland shawl which covered the bed, and again Katharine smiled affectionately and laughed gently at the flattery. Then all was quiet. She leaned back in her chair, thinking — the aged head rested on the white pillow, thinking.

"Katharine," — the eyes opened again, — "what does it all mean, child?"

"What?" asked the young girl, meeting him again out of her reverie.

"Life."

"Ah — if I knew that —"

"You're at the beginning of it — I'm at the end — almost, or quite, it doesn't matter. What's the meaning of all those things I've done, and which you're going to do? They must mean something. I ought to have got at the meaning in so many years."

Katharine was silent. Of late, she, too, had heard the great question asked, which rattles in the throat of the dying century, and is to-day in the ears of all, whether they desire to hear it or not. And no man has answered it yet. A year earlier Katharine would have said but one word in reply. She could not say it now.

In the still, white room she sat by the old man's side and bowed her head silently.

"It's puzzled me a great deal," he said, at last, in his familiar speech. "So long as I cared for

things,—money, principally, I suppose,—it didn't puzzle me at all. It all seemed quite natural. But when I got worn out inside—used up with the wear and tear of having too much—well, then I couldn't care for things any more, and I began to think. And it's all a puzzle, Katharine. It's all a puzzle. We find it all in bits when we come, taken to pieces by the people who have just gone. We spend all our lives in trying to put the thing together on some theory of our own, and in the end we give it up, and go to sleep—‘perchance to dream’—that's Hamlet, isn't it? But I never dreamt much. If it's anything, it isn't a dream. Well, then, what is it?”

Katharine looked up at him with a little, half-childish glance of wonder.

“Why, uncle Robert,” she said, “I always thought you were a religious man—like papa, you know.”

“No.” The old man smiled faintly. “I'm not like your father. I fancy I'm more like you—in some ways. Aren't you religious, as you call it, my dear?”

“I'm religious, as I call it—but not as ‘they’ call it.” She laughed a little, perhaps at herself. “I seem to see something, and I believe in it, without quite seeing it. Oh, I can't explain! I've tried so often, but it's quite hopeless.”

“Try again,” said old Lauderdale. “It can't

do any harm, and it may do me good. I'm so lonely."

Katharine was perhaps too young to understand that loneliness, but the look in the sunken blue eyes touched her. She rose and bent over him, and kissed the pale, wrinkled forehead twice.

"It's our fault — the fault of all us," she said, sinking into her seat again.

"No; it's not," he answered. "I didn't want you all, and I couldn't have the ones I wanted. It doesn't matter now. I want to hear you talk. Try and tell me what you think it all means, from your end of life. I've forgotten — it's so long ago."

He sighed, then coughed, raising himself a little, and then sank back upon his pillow and closed his eyes, as though to listen.

"People say so many things," Katharine began. "Perhaps that's the trouble. One hears so much that disturbs one's belief, and one hears nothing that settles it in any new way. That's what happens to every one. In trying to find reasons for things, people ruin the things themselves with the tools they use. You can't find out the reason of a flower — certainly not by sticking the point of a steel knife into it and cutting the heart out. You can see how it's made — that's science. But the reason of its being a flower has nothing to do with science. If it had, science would find it out,

because science can do anything possible in its own line. But it's always the steel knife — always, always. You can't tell why things exist, by taking them to pieces, can you?"

"No — no — that's it." The old man turned his head slowly from side to side. Then it trembled a little and lay still again. "And the short cut is to say there is no reason for things — that they're all accidents, by selection."

"Yes; that's the short cut, as you say," answered Katharine. "The trouble is that when we've taken it, if we don't want to go back, we ought to want to go on to the end. Nobody will do that. They meet you with a moral right and wrong, after denying that there's a ground for morality. I know — I've talked with a great many people this winter. It's very funny, if you listen to them from any one point of view, no matter which. Then they all seem to be mad. But if one listens inside, — with one's self, I mean, — it's different. It hurts, then. It would break my heart to believe that I had no soul, as some people do. Better believe that one has one's own to begin with, and the fragments of a dozen others clinging to it besides, than to have none at all."

"What's that?" asked the old man, opening his eyes with a look of interest. "What's that about fragments of other people's souls?"

"Oh — it's what some people say. I got it from

Mr. Griggs. Of course it's nonsense — at least — I don't know. It's the one idea that appeals to one — that we go on living over and over again. And he says that in that theory there's an original self, sometimes dormant, sometimes dominant, but which goes on forever — or indefinitely, at least; and then that fragments of the other personalities, of the people we have lived with in a former state, better or worse than the original self, fasten themselves on our own self, and influence its doings, and may put it to sleep, and may eat it up altogether — and that's why we don't always seem to ourselves to be the same person. But I can't begin to remember it all. You should get Mr. Griggs to talk about it. He's very interesting."

"It's a curious theory," said old Lauderdale, evidently disappointed. "It's an ingenious explanation, but it isn't a reason. Explanations aren't reasons — I mean, they're not causes."

"No," answered Katharine, "of course they're not. The belief is the cause, I suppose."

The sick man glanced at her keenly and then closed his eyes once more. Katharine rose quietly and went to the windows to draw down the shades a little.

"Don't!" cried Lauderdale, sharply, in his hoarse voice. "I like the light. It's all the light I have."

Katharine came back and sat down beside him again.

"I wasn't going to sleep," he said, presently. "I was thinking of what you had said, that belief was the cause. Well—if I believe in God, I must ask, '*Domine quo vadis?*'—mustn't I? You know enough Latin to understand that. What do you answer?"

"*Tendit ad astra.*"

It was one of those quick replies which any girl who knew a few Latin phrases might easily make. But it struck the ears of the man whose strength was far spent. He raised his hands a little, and brought them together with a strangely devout gesture.

"To the stars," he said in a whisper, and his eyes looked upwards.

Katharine rested her chin upon her hand, leaning forwards and watching him. An expression passed over his face which she had never seen, though she had read of the mysterious brightness which sometimes illuminates the features of dying persons. She thought it must be that, and she was suddenly afraid, yet fascinated. But she was mistaken. It was only a gleam of hope. Words can mean so much more than the things they name.

And a dream-like interpretation of the two Latin phrases suggested itself to her. It was as though, looking at the venerable and just man who was departing, she had asked of him, 'Sir, whither goest thou?' And as though a voice had answered her,

'Starwards'—and as though her own eyes might be those stars—the stars of youth and life—from which he had come long ago and to which he was even now returning, to take new childish strength and to live again through the years. Then he spoke, and the dream vanished.

"I believe in Something," he said. "Call it God, child, and let me pray to It, and die in peace."

CHAPTER III.

KATHARINE said nothing, not knowing what to say. During what seemed to her a long time, old Lauderdale lay quite still. Then he seemed to rouse himself, and as he turned his head he coughed painfully.

"I want you to know how I've left the money," he said abruptly, when he had recovered his breath.

"Do you think I ought to know?" asked Katharine, in some surprise.

"Yes—I don't know whether you ought—no. But I want you to know. I've confidence in your judgment, my dear."

"Oh, uncle Robert! As though your own were not a thousand times better!"

"In matters of business it may be. But this is quite another thing. You see, there are a good many who ought to have a share, and a good many who expect some of it, whether they have any claim or not. I want to know if you think I've acted fairly by everybody. Will you tell me, quite honestly? Nobody else would — except Katharine Ralston, perhaps."

"But I don't want to be made the judge of your actions, dear uncle Robert!" protested Katharine.

"Well — make a sacrifice, then, and do something you don't like," answered the old man, gruffly.

It would have pleased Doctor Routh to see how soon his temper rose at the merest sign of opposition.

"Well — tell me, then," said Katharine, reluctantly.

"It's a simple will," began the old man, and then he paused, as though reflecting upon it. "Well — you see," he continued, presently, "I argued in this way. I said to myself that the money ought either to go back to its original source — I've thought a great deal about that, too, and I've made sketches of wills leaving everything to the poor, in a big trust — I suppose every rich man has made rough sketches of queer wills at one time or another." He paused a moment and seemed to be thinking. "Yes," he resumed, presently, "either it should go back to the people, or else it ought to go amongst the Lauderdales, as directly as possible. Now there's my brother, first — your grandfather. He's older than I am, but he's careless and foolish about money. He'd give it all away — better leave something to his asylums and things, and give him an income but no capital. He doesn't want anything for himself — he's a

good man, and I wish I were like him. Then there's your father, next, and Katharine Ralston — my nephew and niece. They don't want a lot of money, either, do they?"

Katharine's eyes expressed a little astonishment in spite of herself, and the old man saw it. He hesitated a while, coughed, cleared his throat, and then seemed to make up his mind.

"It's been my opinion for a long time," he said, slowly, "that your father has a good deal of his own."

"Papa!" exclaimed Katharine. "Why — he always says he's so poor! You don't know how economical he is, and makes us be. I'm sure he can't be rich."

"Rich — h'm — that's a relative expression nowadays. He's not rich, compared with me — but he has enough, he has quite enough."

"Oh — enough — yes," answered the young girl. "The house is comfortable, and we have plenty to eat." She laughed a little. "But as for clothes, you know — well, if my mother didn't sell her miniatures, I don't know exactly what she and I should do — nor what Charlotte would have done, before she was married."

Robert Lauderdale looked at her intently for several seconds.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, at length, "that when your dear mother sells her little paint-

ings, it's to get money for her and you to dress on?"

"Yes—of course. What did you think?"

"I thought it was for her small charities," he answered, bending his rough brows with an expression of mingled pain and anger. "It seemed to me a good thing that she should have that interest. If I'd known that your father kept you all so close—"

"But I really think he's poor, uncle Robert."

"Poor! Nonsense! He's got a million, anyway. I know it. Don't look at me like that—as though you didn't believe me. I tell you, I know it. I don't know how much more he has, but he's got that."

He moved restlessly on his side, with more energy than he had yet shown, for he was growing angry.

"There's some money in the drawer of that little table," he said, pointing with his hand, which trembled a little. "It's open—just get what there is and bring it here, will you?"

Katharine rose.

"I don't want any money, if you mean to give it to me," she said, as she crossed the room.

She brought him a roll of bills.

"Count it," he said.

She counted carefully, turning back the crisp green notes over her delicate fingers. It was new money.

"There are three hundred and fifty dollars," she said. "At least, I think I've counted right."

"Near enough. Make a note of it, my dear. There are pencil and paper on the table. There — just write down the figure. Now put the money into your pocket, and go and spend it on some trifle."

"I'd rather not," answered Katharine, hesitating.

She had never had so much money in her hand in her whole life, though she was the grand-niece of Robert the Rich.

"Do as I tell you!" cried the old man, almost fiercely, and in a much stronger voice than he had been able to find hitherto.

Katharine obeyed, seeing that he was really losing his temper.

"You may as well spend it on toys as leave it to the servants," he said. "They'd have stolen it as soon as I was dead. Not that I mean to die, though. Not till I've settled one or two things like this. I feel stronger."

"I'm so glad!" exclaimed Katharine.

"So am I," growled the sick man. "You've saved my life."

"I?"

"Yes, child. Go and tell Routh that I said so. Upon my word!" he grumbled, half audibly. "Selling her poor little miniatures to buy clothes for herself and her children — my nieces — that's

just a little too much, you know — can't see how I could die decently — well — without telling him what I think about it. Katharine," he said, more loudly, addressing her, "it amounts to this. I've left a few charities, and I've left the Miners a little something to make them comfortable, and I've given a million to the Brights — Hamilton and Hester and their mother — and I've left the rest to you three young ones — you and Charlotte and Jack Ralston. That ought to make about twenty-five millions for each of you. I want to know if you think I've done right?"

Katharine's hands dropped by her side. For the first time in her life she was literally struck dumb.

"That doesn't mean," continued the old man, watching her keenly, as the light came back to his eyes, "that doesn't mean that I give you all that money, just as I gave you that roll of bills just now. It's all tied up in trusts, just as far as the law would allow me to do it. You couldn't take it and throw it into the street, nor speculate, nor buy a railway, nor do anything of the kind. You and Charlotte will have to pay half your income to your father and mother while they live, and you'll have to leave it to your children — at least, Charlotte must, and I hope you will, my dear. And Jack must give half of his income to his mother. You see, as there are three parents, that will make it exactly equal. And all three of you have to

pay something to make up an income for your grandfather. So it will still be equally shared. I like you best, my dear, but I couldn't show any favouritism in my will. The end of it will be that you will each have something less than half the income of twenty-five millions to spend. That's better than selling miniatures to buy clothes, anyway. Isn't it, now?"

He laughed hoarsely and then coughed.

"Go home, child," he said, presently. "I've talked too much. Stop, though. What I've told you is not to be repeated on any account. I wanted to know what you thought of the right and wrong of the thing — but I've taken your breath away. Go home and think about it. Come and see me day after to-morrow — there, I shouldn't have said that an hour ago — give me a little of that beef tea, please, my dear. I'm hungry — and I'd rather have it from your hand than from Mrs. Deems's. Thank you."

He drank eagerly, and she took the cup from him and set it down again.

"She's a good creature, the nurse," he said. "A very good creature — a sort of holy scarecrow. I shan't need her much longer."

"You really do seem better," said Katharine, wondering how she could ever have believed that he was dying.

"I'm going to get well this time. I told Routh

this morning that I wasn't going to die. You've saved my life. There's nothing like rage for the action of the heart, I believe. I shall be out next week."

He began to cough again.

"Go home—go home," he managed to say, between the short spasms. "I'm talking too much."

Katharine bent down and kissed his forehead quickly, looked at him affectionately and left the room, for she saw that what he said was true. She closed the door softly and found her way to the stairs. She was in haste to get out into the air and to be alone, for she wished, if possible, to realize the stupendous possibilities of life which the last few minutes had brought into her range of mental vision. It was not a light thing to have been told that she was one day to be among the richest of her very rich acquaintances, after having been brought up in such a penurious fashion.

In the hall she came suddenly upon her father and mother, who were parleying with the butler.

"Here's Miss Katharine, sir," said the servant, and he immediately fell back, glad to avoid further discussion with such a very obstinate person as Alexander Junior.

"Why, Katharine!" exclaimed Mrs. Lauderdale, in surprise. "Do you mean to say you're here?"

"Yes—didn't you know? Doctor Routh sent

me up in his carriage. He met me on the steps just as he was going in to see you. Didn't he tell you?"

"No — how very extraordinary!"

Mrs. Lauderdale's face assumed a grave expression not untinged with displeasure.

"This is very strange," said her husband. "And Leek has just been telling us that uncle Robert could see no one."

"I beg pardon, sir," said the butler, coming forward respectfully. "There were orders that when Miss Katharine came, Mr. Lauderdale was not to be disturbed."

"Yes," answered Alexander Junior, coldly. "I understand. Come, Emma — come, Katharine — we shall be late for luncheon."

"It isn't half-past twelve yet," observed Katharine, glancing at the great old clock, which at that moment gave 'warning' of the coming chime for the half-hour.

"It's of no consequence what time it is," said her father, more coldly than ever. "Come!"

They went out together, and the door closed behind them. Alexander Lauderdale stood still upon the pavement and faced his daughter, with a peculiarly hard look in his eyes.

"What does this all mean, Katharine?" he enquired, severely. "Your mother and I desire some explanation."

"There's nothing to explain," answered the young girl. "Uncle Robert wanted to see me, and Doctor Routh told me so, and was kind enough to send me up in his carriage. I was coming away when I met you. There's nothing to explain."

Alexander Junior very nearly lost his temper. He could not recollect having done so since he had refused to accept John Ralston as his son-in-law, nearly eighteen months ago. But his steely grey eyes began to gleam now, and his clear, pale skin grew paler. It was evident that his mind was working rapidly in a direction which Katharine could not understand.

"I wish to know what he said to you," he replied.

"Why do you want to know?" asked Katharine, unwisely, for she herself was agitated.

"I have a right to know," answered her father, peremptorily.

It was unlike him to go to such lengths of insistence at once, and even Mrs. Lauderdale was surprised, and glanced at him somewhat timidly.

"Shall we walk on?" she suggested. "I'm cold — there's a chilly wind from the corner."

They began to move, Alexander Junior walking between them, with Katharine on his left. She did not reply to his last speech at once, and his anger rose.

"When I speak to you, Katharine, I expect to be answered," he said.

"Yes," replied Katharine, coolly. "I was thinking of what I should say."

She had been taken unawares, and found it hard to decide how to act. She thought he was angry because he suspected her of trying to influence the old millionaire to do something which might facilitate her marriage with John Ralston, little guessing that in the eyes of the church and the law she was married already. So far as revealing anything about the dispositions of her great-uncle's will might be concerned, she had not the slightest intention of saying anything about it, nor of even hinting that he had spoken of it. She was capable of quite as much obstinacy as her father, and she was far more intelligent; but she disliked a quarrel of any sort, and yet, placed as she was, she could not see how to avoid one, if he continued to insist. Mrs. Lauderdale saw that trouble was imminent, and tried to come to the rescue.

"How did he seem to be, dear?" she enquired, speaking across her husband. "Doctor Routh was not very encouraging."

"He is better—really better, I'm sure," answered Katharine, seizing the opportunity of turning the conversation. "When I first went in, he looked dreadfully ill. His eyes are quite sunken and his cheeks are positively hollow. But gradually, as

we talked, he revived, and when I left him he really seemed quite cheerful."

She paused, not seeing how she could go on talking about the old gentleman's appearance much longer. She hoped her mother would ask another question, but her father interposed again, with senseless and almost brutal persistence.

"I'm glad to hear that he is better," he said. "But I'm still waiting for an answer to my question. What was the nature of the conversation between you, Katharine? I insist upon knowing."

"Really, papa," answered the young girl, looking up to him with eyes almost as hard as his own, "I don't see why you should be so determined to know."

"It's of no consequence why I wish to know. It should be sufficient for you to understand my wishes. I expect you to obey me at once and to give a clear account of what took place. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly — oh, yes!"

It was evident from Katharine's tone that she did not intend to satisfy him. Her mother thought that she might have excused herself instead of refusing so abruptly. She might have even given a harmless sketch of an imaginary conversation. But that was not her way, as she would have said.

Alexander's anger increased with every moment, in a way by no means normal with him. He said

nothing for a few moments, but walked stiffly on, biting his clean-shaven upper lip with his bright teeth. He felt himself helpless, which made the position worse.

"So uncle Robert is really better," said Mrs. Lauderdale, pacifically inclined.

"I think so," answered Katharine, mechanically.

"I'm very glad. Aren't you glad, Alexander, my dear?" she asked, turning to her husband.

"Of course. What a foolish question!"

Mrs. Lauderdale felt that under the circumstances it had certainly been a very foolish question, and she relapsed into silence. She was, on the whole, a very good woman, and was sincere in saying that she was glad of the old man's recovery. This was not inconsistent with her recent haste to inform her husband of the supposed danger. It had seemed quite natural to her to think of going instantly to old Robert Lauderdale's bedside, if there were any possibility of his dying. She knew, also, far better than Katharine had known, what an immense sum was to be divided at his death, and considering the life she had led under her husband's economic rule, she might be pardoned if, even being strongly attached to the old gentleman, she was a little agitated at the thought of the changes imminent in her own existence. There is a point at which humanity must be forgiven for being human. In the memorable struggle for the great

Lauderdale fortune, which divided the tribe against itself, it must not be forgotten that Mrs. Lauderdale was sincerely fond of the man who had accumulated the wealth, though she afterwards took a distinct side in the affairs, and showed herself as eager as many others to obtain as much as possible for her husband and her children.

Meanwhile, in spite of her, the opening skirmish continued sharply. After walking nearly the length of a block in silence, Alexander Junior once more turned his head in the direction of his daughter.

"Am I to understand, Katharine, that you definitely refuse to speak?" he enquired, sternly.

"If you mean that I should tell you in detail all that uncle Robert and I said to each other this morning,—yes. I refuse."

"Do you know that you are disobedient and undutiful?"

"It isn't necessary to discuss that. I'm not a child any longer."

"Very well. We shall see."

And they continued to walk in silence. Alexander was fond of walking and of all sorts of exercise, when it did not interfere with the rigid punctuality of his business habits. He had been a very strong man in his youth.

This was the beginning of hostilities, and the events hitherto described took place in the month of April.

Robert Lauderdale's instinct had not deceived him, in prompting him to say that he was not going to die when he seemed most ill. He rallied quickly, and within a fortnight of the day on which he had sent for Katharine, he was able to be driven in the Park, in the noon sunshine. He was changed, and had grown suddenly much thinner, but most of his friends thought that at his age this was no bad sign.

Ever since that crisis there had been a coldness between Katharine and her father. She felt that he was watching her perpetually, looking, perhaps, for an opportunity of making her feel his displeasure, and assuredly trying to find out what she knew. The subject was not mentioned, and Alexander Junior seemed to have accepted his defeat more calmly than might have been expected; but Katharine knew his character well enough to be sure that the humiliation rankled, and that the obstinate determination to find out the secret was as constantly present as ever.

Katharine's life became more and more difficult and complicated, and she seemed to become more powerless every day, when she tried to see some way of simplifying it. She found herself, indeed, in a very extraordinary position, and one which requires a little elucidation for all those who are not acquainted with her previous history.

In the first place, she had been secretly married

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to her second cousin John Ralston, nearly five months before the beginning of this story. John Ralston had faults which could not be concealed. It had been said with some truth that he drank and occasionally played high; that he was a failure, as far as any worldly success was concerned, was evident enough, although he was now making what seemed to be a determined effort at regular work. He was certainly not a particularly good young man. His father, the admiral, who had been dead some years, had been a brave sailor and distinguished in the service, but there were many stories of his wild doings, so that those who trace all character to heredity may find an excuse for John's evil tendencies in his father's temperament. Be this as it may, he had undoubtedly been exceedingly 'lively,' as his distant cousin and best friend, Hamilton Bright, expressed it.

But he had his good points. He was honourable to a fault. He loved Katharine with a single-hearted devotion very rare in so young a man,—for he was only five and twenty years of age,—and for her sake had been making a desperate attempt to master his worse instincts. He could be said to have succeeded in that, at least, since he had made his good resolutions. Whether he could keep them for the rest of his life was another matter.

Katharine's father, however, put no faith in him, and never would. Moreover, John was a poor

man, a consideration which had great weight. No one could suspect that his great uncle intended to leave him a large share of the fortune, and it was very generally believed that they had quarrelled and that John Ralston was to be cut off with nothing. This opinion was partly due to the fact that John kept away from Robert Lauderdale's house more than the rest of the family, because he dreaded the idea of being counted among the hangers on of the tribe. But Alexander Lauderdale could not forbid him the house, because he was a relation, but altogether refused to hear of a marriage with Katharine. He hoped to make for her a match as good as her sister's, if not better. The scene with John had been almost violent, but the young lovers had contrived to see each other with the freedom afforded by society to near relatives.

Almost a year had passed in this way, and there had seemed to be no prospect of a solution, when Katharine had taken the law into her own hands, being at that time nineteen years old. She had persuaded John that if he would marry her secretly, she could at once prevail on old Robert Lauderdale to find him some occupation in the West. After much hesitation John Ralston had consented, on condition that uncle Robert should be told immediately. The pair were secretly married by a clergyman whom John persuaded to perform the ceremony,

and an hour later Katharine had told the old gentleman her secret. He at once offered to make her and John independent—for the honour of the family; but John had stipulated that he was to receive nothing of the nature of money. That would have been like begging with a loaded pistol. What he wanted was a position in which he might do some sort of work, and receive an equivalent sufficient to support himself and his wife. Robert Lauderdale at once proved to his grand-niece that such a scheme was wholly impracticable. John could do nothing which could earn him a dollar a day. Katharine had to own at last that he was right. He said that if John would work steadily in an office in New York, even for a year, it would be easy to push him rapidly into success.

The compromise was accepted as the only way out of the difficulty. The secret marriage remained a secret, and a mere accomplished formality. John continued to live with his mother as though he were a bachelor; Katharine stayed under her father's roof as Miss Lauderdale. John returned to Beman Brothers, and was now working there, as has been said more than once. Katharine had to bear all the difficulties of a totally false position in society. These had been the results of the secret marriage, so far as actual consequences in fact were concerned. Morally speaking, there could be no question but that John Ralston, at least, had profited

enormously by the sense of honourable responsibility Katharine had forced upon him. He had made one of those supreme efforts of which natures nervous by temperament, melancholy, and sometimes susceptible of exaltation, are often capable. The almost divine dignity which his mother had taught him to attribute to the code of honour stood him in good stead. He saw by the light which guides heroes, things not heroic in themselves to be done, but brave at least, and they were easy to him, because, for Katharine's sake, he would have done much more.

So far as Katharine was concerned, the effect upon her was different. It might even be questioned whether it were a good effect. She was helpless to do anything which could improve her position, and the result was a feeling of hostility against her surroundings. The whole fabric of society seemed to her to rest upon a doubtful foundation, since two young people so eminently fitted for each other could be forced by it into such a situation.

They were of equal standing in every way; she had even lately learned that their prospects of fortune, which were little short of colossal, were precisely the same. They loved each other. They were married by church and law. Yet between John's code of honour, on the one hand, and Alexander Lauderdale's determined opposition, on

the other, they dared not so much as own that they were husband and wife, lest some enormous social scandal should ensue. They had but one alternative — to leave New York together, which meant starvation, or else to accept Robert Lauderdale's help in the form of money, which John was too proud to do. And though John would have been quite ready to starve alone, he had no intention of subjecting Katharine to any such ordeal. He blamed himself most bitterly for having accepted the secret marriage at all, but since the thing was done, he meant to do his share and bear his burden manfully and honourably. It was all he could do to atone for his weakness in having yielded, and for the trouble he had caused Katharine.

But she had no such active part as he. He must work, for he had chosen that salvation for his self-respect, and it was her portion to wait until he could win his independence on his own merits, since he would not be indebted for it to any one. The waiting is often harder to bear than the working. Katharine grew impatient of the conventions in the midst of which she lived, and found fault with the system of all modern society.

She was strangely repelled, too, by the attentions of the young men she met daily, and danced with, and sat beside at dinner. They had amused her until the last winter. She was not one of those

girls who either feign indifference to amusement, or really feel it, and so long as she had been free to enjoy herself without any secondary thoughts about the meaning of enjoyment, she had found the world a pleasant place. Now, however, she was for the first time made conscious that several of the young fellows who surrounded her at parties really wished to marry her. The genuine and pure-hearted convictions concerning the inviolable sanctity of marriage, which are peculiarly strong in American young girls, asserted themselves with Katharine at every moment. Being the lawfully wedded wife of John Ralston, it seemed an outrage that young Van De Water, for instance, should seek occasion to assure her of his devotion. Yet, since he, like the rest, knew nothing of the truth, she could not blame him if he had chanced to fall in love with her. She could only refuse to listen to him and discourage his advances, feeling all the while a most unreasonable and yet womanly desire to hand him over to her husband's tender mercies, together with a firm faith that John was not only able, but would also be quite disposed, to slay the offender forthwith.

This seems to prove that woman is naturally good, and that harm can only reach her by slow stages. And it is a curious reflection that generally in the world good, when it comes, comes quickly and evil slowly. Great purifying religions

have arisen and washed whole nations clean, almost in one man's lifetime, whereas it has always required generations of luxury and vice to undermine the solidity of any strong people. A first sin is rarely more than an episode, too often exaggerated by those who would direct the conscience, and who leave the offenders to the terrible danger of discovering such exaggerations later, and then of setting down all wrong-doing as insignificant because the first was made to appear greater than it was.

Katharine hated the falseness of her position, and the perpetual irritation to which she was exposed unsettled the balance of her girlish convictions as they had emerged from the process of education, ready-made, honest, and somewhat conventional. The disturbance awakened abnormal activity in her mind, and she fell into the habit of questioning and discussing almost every accepted article of creeds social and spiritual.

Hence her liking for the society of Paul Griggs, whose experience was a fact, but whose convictions were a mystery not easily fathomed. Alexander Lauderdale especially detested the man for his easy way of accepting anybody's religious beliefs, as though the form of religion were of no importance whatever, while perpetually thrusting forward the humanity of mankind as the principal point of interest in life. But when he was alone with Katharine, or with some kindred spirit, Griggs sometimes talked of other things.

The day on which Katharine, returning from Robert Lauderdale's house, refused to answer her father's questions was an important one in her history and in the lives of many closely connected with her; and this has seemed the best place for offering an explanation of such preceding events as bear directly upon all that followed. Here, therefore, ends the prologue to the story which is to tell of the lives of John Ralston and his wife, commonly known as Miss Lauderdale, during the great battle for the Lauderdale fortune. It has been a long prologue, and, as is usually the case in such tiresome preliminary pieces, the majority of the actors in the real play have not yet appeared, and the few who have come before the curtain crave as yet indulgence rather than applause. They have shown their faces and have explained the general nature of what is to be represented, and they retire as gracefully as they can, under rather difficult circumstances, to reappear in such actions and situations as should explain themselves.

CHAPTER IV.

IN itself, Robert Lauderdale's will was a very fair one. It provided, as has been seen, that each of the living members of the family in the direct line should have an equal income, while insuring the important condition that the money should remain in the hands of the Lauderdales and Ralstons as long as possible, since the income paid to the four elder members, Alexander Lauderdale Senior, Alexander Junior, the latter's wife and Mrs. Ralston, John's mother, should revert at the deaths of each to the three younger heirs, John Ralston, Katharine, and Charlotte Slayback, and afterwards to the children of each.

This result seemed just and, on the whole, to be desired. Robert Lauderdale had devoted much thought to the subject, and had seen no other way of acting fairly and at the same time of providing as far as possible against the subdivision and disappearance of the great fortune he had amassed. The will was to constitute three separate trusts, one for each of the direct legatees and their children, at whose death the trusts would expire,

and the property be further divided amongst the succeeding generations in each line.

The old millionaire was a very enlightened man, and had honestly endeavoured during his lifetime to understand the conditions and obligations to which the possessors of very large fortunes should submit. Looking at the matter from this point of view, he had come to regard the accumulation and dissipation of wealth as a succession of natural phenomena, somewhat analogous to those of evaporation and rain, beneficial when gradual, destructive when sudden. As water is drawn up in the form of vapour, in invisible atoms, gradually to accumulate in the form of clouds, which, moving under natural conditions, are borne towards those regions where moisture is most needed, to descend gently and be lost in showers that give earth life, until the sky above is clear again, and all the fields below are green with growing things — so, thought Robert Lauderdale, should wealth follow a reasonable and beneficial course of constant distribution and redistribution, to promote which was a moral obligation upon those through whose hands it passed. He was not sure that it was in any way his duty to leave vast sums for charities, nor to hasten the subdivision of the property in any violent way ; for he knew well enough that sudden divisions generally mean the forcible depression of values, in which case wealth, of which the

income being spent regularly should find its way to the points where it is most needed, must, on the contrary, become dormant until values are restored, if indeed they ever are restored altogether.

If he had been the father of one or more children, there is no knowing how he might have acted. If there had been in the whole family one man whom he sincerely trusted to act wisely, he might have left him the bulk of the fortune, giving each of the others a sum which would have been large compared with what they had of their own, but wholly insignificant by the side of the main property. But no such selection was possible. His brother was a very old man, wholly unfitted for the purpose. His brother's son was a miser, and a dull one at that, in Robert's estimation. John Ralston was not to be thought of for a moment. Hamilton Bright would have answered the conditions, but he was far removed in relationship, being a descendant of Robert Lauderdale's uncle through a female line. Nevertheless, Robert Lauderdale hesitated.

It was perhaps natural that Alexander Junior should believe that he was the proper person for his uncle to select as the principal heir. He was the only son of the eldest of the family. He was a man of stainless reputation, occupying a position of high importance and trust. No one could have denied that he was scrupulous in business matters

to a degree rare even amongst the most honourable men of his own city. He was comparatively young, being only fifty years old, and he might live a quarter of a century to administer and hold together the Lauderdale estate, for his health was magnificent and his strength of iron.

He had thought it all over daily for so many years, that he could see no possible reason why he should not be the principal heir. In arguing the case, he told himself that his uncle was not capricious, that he would certainly not leave his fortune to Hamilton Bright, who was the only other sensible man of business in the whole connection, and that it was generally in the nature of very rich men to wish to know that their wealth was to be kept together after they were dead. No one could possibly do that better than Alexander Lauderdale Junior.

Nevertheless, he felt conscious that his uncle disliked him personally, and in moments of depression, when he had taken too little exercise and his liver was torpid, the certainty of this caused him much uneasiness. There was no apparent reason for it, and it suggested to his self-satisfied nature the idea that some caprice entered, after all, into the nature of his uncle. On such occasions he rarely failed to instruct Mrs. Lauderdale to ask uncle Robert to dinner, and to be particularly careful that the fish should be perfect. Uncle Robert

was fond of fish and a quiet family party. Katherine was his favourite, but he liked Mrs. Lauderdale, and his brother, the old philanthropist, was congenial to him, though the two took very different views of humanity and the public good. Alexander Senior's dream was to get possession of all Robert's millions and distribute them within a week amongst a number of asylums and charitable institutions which he patronized. He should then feel that he had done a good work and that his benevolent instincts had been satisfied. He sometimes sat in his study in a cloud of smoke — for he smoked execrable tobacco perpetually — and tried to persuade himself that 'brother Bob' might perhaps after all leave him the whole fortune. There would be great joy among the idiots on that day, thought old Alexander, as the two-cent 'Virginia cheroot' dropped from his hand, and he fell asleep in his well-worn armchair. And then came dreams of unbounded charity, of unlimited improvement and education of the poor and deficient. The greatest men of the age should be employed to devote their lives to the happiness of the poor little blind boys, and of the little girls born deaf, and of the vacantly staring blear-eyed youths whom nature had made carelessly, and whom God had sent into the world, perhaps, as a means of grace to those more richly endowed. For old Alexander was charitable to every one —

even to the Supreme Being, whose motives he ventured to judge. He was incapable of an unkind thought, and in the heaven of his old fancy he would have founded an asylum for reformed devils and would not have hesitated to beg a subscription of Satan himself, being quite ready to believe that the Prince of Hell might have his good moments. He would have prayed cheerfully for ‘the puir deil.’ There is no limit to the charity of such over-kind hearts. Nothing seems to them so bad but that, by gentleness and persuasion, it may at last be made good.

He knew, of course, for Robert had told him, that he was not to have the millions even during the few remaining years of his life, and he bore his brother no malice for the decision. Robert promised him that he should have plenty of money for his poor people, but did not hesitate to say that if he had the whole property he would pauperize half the city of New York in six months.

“ You’d give every newsboy and messenger boy in the city a roast turkey for dinner every day,” laughed Robert.

“ If I thought it might improve the condition of poor boys, I certainly should,” answered the philanthropist, gravely. “ I’m fond of roast turkey myself — with cranberry sauce and chestnuts inside. Why shouldn’t the poor little fellows have it, too, if every one had enough money ? ”

“If there were enough money to go round, creation would be turned into a kitchen for a week, and into a hospital for six months afterwards,” observed Robert Lauderdale. “Fortunately, money’s scarcer than greediness.”

And on the whole, there was much wisdom in this plain view, which to Robert himself presented a clear picture of the condition of mankind in general in regard to money and its distribution.

It would not have been natural if even the least money-loving members of the family had not often speculated, each in his or her own way, about the chances of receiving something very considerable when old Robert died. He had been generous to them all, according to his lights, but he had not considered that any of them were objects of charity. The true conditions of his brother’s household life had been carefully concealed from him, until Katharine had, almost accidentally, given him an insight into her father’s family methods, so to say. Nevertheless, he had long known that Alexander Junior must have much more money than he was commonly thought to possess, and his mode of living, as compared with his fortune, proved conclusively that he hoarded what he had. He must have known that a large share of the estate must ultimately come to him, and he could assuredly have had no doubts as to its solidity, since it consisted entirely in land and houses. What was he

hoarding his income for? That was the question which naturally suggested itself to Robert, and the only answer he could find, and the one which accorded perfectly with his own knowledge of his nephew's character, was that Alexander was a miser. As the certainty solidified in the rich man's mind, he became more and more determined that Alexander Junior should know nothing of the dispositions of the will.

And he had rigidly kept his own counsel until that day when he had confided in Katharine. When he was well again, or, at all events, so far recovered as to feel sure that he might live some time longer, he regretted what he had done. Weakened by illness, he had acted on impulse in making a young girl the repository of his secret intentions. Moreover, he had not intended to part with the right to change them whenever he should see fit, and the problem of the distribution of wealth continued to absorb his attention. He had great faith in Katharine, but, after all, she was not a man, as he told himself repeatedly. She might be expected to confide in John Ralston, who might, on some unfortunate day, drink a glass of wine too much and reveal the facts of the case. He would have been even more disturbed than he was, had he known that Alexander Junior suspected his daughter of knowing the truth.

Robert Lauderdale had certainly not made her

life easier for her by what he had done. During several days her father from time to time repeated his questions.

"I hope that you are in an altered frame of mind, Katharine," he said. "This perpetual obstinacy on the part of my child is very painful to me."

"I might say something of the same kind," Katharine answered. "It's painful—as you choose to call it—to me, to be questioned again and again about a thing I won't speak of. Why will you do it? You seem to think that I hold my tongue out of sheer eccentricity, just to annoy you. Is that what you think? If so, you're very much mistaken."

"It's the only possible explanation of your undutiful conduct. I repeat that I'm very much pained by your behaviour."

"Look here, papa!" cried Katharine, turning upon him suddenly. "Don't drag in the question of duty. It's one's duty to keep a secret when one's heard it—whether one wanted to hear it or not. There's no reason in the world why I should repeat to you what uncle Robert told me—any more than why I should go and tell Charlotte, or Hester Crowdie, or anybody else."

"Katharine!" exclaimed Alexander Junior, sternly, "you are very impertinent."

"Because I tell you what I think my duty is? I'm sorry you should think so. And besides, since

you seem so very anxious that I should betray a secret, I'm afraid that it wouldn't be very safe with you."

Alexander Junior did not wince under the cut. He was firmly persuaded that he was in the right.

"If you were not a grown-up woman, I should send you to your room," he said, coldly.

"Yes, I realize the advantage of being grown up," answered Katharine, with contempt.

"But I shall not tolerate this conduct any longer," continued Alexander Junior. "I will not be defied by my own daughter."

"Charlotte defied you for twenty years," replied Katharine, "and she's not half as strong as I am. And I never defied you, and I don't now. That's not the way I should put it. I'm not so dramatic, and as long as I won't, — why, I won't, that's all, — and there's no need of calling it defiance, nor by any other big name."

Alexander was a cold man, and it was not likely that he should lose his temper again as he had when he had walked home with her from Robert Lauderdale's. He began to recognize that in the matter of imposing his will forcibly, he had met his match. He had generally succeeded in dominating those with whom he came into close relations in life, but his hard and freezing exterior had contributed more to the effect than his intellectual gifts. Finding that his personality failed to pro-

duce the usual result, he temporized, for he was not good at sharp answers.

"There's no denying the fact," he said, "that uncle Robert has told you about his will. Can you deny that?"

The latter question is a terrible weapon, and is the favourite one of dull persons when dealing with truthful ones, because it is so easily used and so effective. Katharine was familiar with it, and knew that her father had few others, and none so strong. She met it in the approved fashion, which is as good as any, though none are satisfactory.

"That's an absurd question," she answered. "You've made up your mind beforehand, and nothing I could say would make you change it. If I denied that uncle Robert had told me anything about his will, you wouldn't believe me."

"Certainly not!" replied Alexander, falling into the trap like a school-boy.

"Then it's clear that nothing I can say can make you change your mind—in other words, that you're prejudiced," said Katharine, in cool triumph. "And as that's undeniable, from your own words, I don't see that it's of the slightest use to ask me questions."

Her father bit his clean-shaven upper lip and frowned severely.

"I don't know where you get such sophistries from!" he answered, in impotent arrogance. "Un-

less it's that Mr. Griggs who teaches you," he added, taking a new line of aggression.

"Why do you say 'that' Mr. Griggs, as though he were an adventurer or a fool?" enquired Katharine, arching her black brows.

"Because I suspect him of being both," answered Alexander Junior, jumping at the suggestion with an affectation of keenness.

Katharine laughed.

"That's too absurd, papa! You'd have said just the same thing if I'd said 'murderer' and 'thief.' You know as well as I do that Mr. Griggs is a distinguished man,—I didn't say that he was a great genius,—who has got where he is by hard work and good work. He's no more of an adventurer than you are."

"I've heard strange stories of his youth, which I shall certainly not repeat to you," answered Alexander, snapping his lips in the fine consciousness of his own really unimpeachable virtue.

One proverb, at least, is true, amidst many high-sounding, conventional lies. Virtue is emphatically its own reward. The scorn of those who possess it for those who do not, proves the fact beyond all doubt.

"I'm not going to discuss Mr. Griggs, and I don't want to hear about his youth," answered Katharine. "You've taken an unreasonable dislike for him, and there's no necessity for your meeting any oftener than you please."

"Fortunately, no — there's no necessity. I should be sorry to associate with such men, and I regret very much that you should choose your friends amongst them. Since you've announced your intention of defying me and disregarding all my wishes, we'll say no more about that for the present. Perhaps I shall find means to bring you to reason which will surprise you. In the meantime, I consider that you are acting very unwisely in refusing to communicate what you know about the will."

"Possibly — but I'm willing to abide by my mistake," answered Katharine, calmly.

"It is of course certain," continued her father, "that a very large sum of money will come to us when my uncle Robert dies — some day. Let us hope that it may be long before that happens."

"By all means, let's hope so," observed Katharine.

"Don't interrupt me, Katharine. You can at least show me the common courtesy of listening to what I say, whatever position you may choose to take up against me. As I was saying, a great deal of money will come to some of us. We do not know exactly how much it will be, though I've no doubt that you're acquainted with all the details. But I admit that you can't possibly appreciate how important it is for us all to know how this great fortune is to be disposed of, and who has

been selected as the administrator. The happiness of many persons, the safety of the fortune itself, depend upon these things being known in time."

"I don't see what they can have to do with the safety of the fortune. Houses don't run away. I've often heard you say that uncle Robert has everything in houses. I suppose one person will get one house and another will get another."

"I'm not here to explain the principle of business to you," said Alexander. "Those are things you can't understand. The death of a man of such immense wealth necessarily affects public affairs and the market, even if his fortune is largely in real estate. It is a security to the world at large to feel that a proper person has succeeded in the management of the estate."

"I suppose that uncle Robert understands that, too," observed Katharine.

"In a way, of course — yes, in a certain way he must, I've no doubt. But these great men never seem to realize what will happen when they die."

"You speak of uncle Robert's death as though you expected to hear of it this evening. He's almost quite well."

Again Alexander Junior bit his lip. He had, perhaps, never before been so conscious that when his personality failed to produce the effect he desired, his intelligence had no chance of accomplishing anything unaided.

"This is intolerable!" he exclaimed, with profound disgust. "Since you can be neither decently civil nor in any way reasonable, I shall leave you to think over your conduct."

This is a threat which rarely inspires terror in the offender. Katharine did not wish to go too far, and received the announcement in silence, sincerely hoping that he would really go away and leave her to herself. Such scenes occurred almost every day, and she was weary of them,—not more so, perhaps, than Alexander was of perpetual defeat. She could not understand why he was so persistent, for it seemed to her that she showed him plainly enough how determined she was to keep silence. His reproof did not affect her in the least, for she knew she was right. She wondered, indeed, from time to time, that a man so undoubtedly upright as he was should so press her to betray a confidence, when he had all his life preached to her about the value of reticence and discretion, and she rightly attributed his conduct to his excessive anxiety for the money, overriding even his rigid principles. She had often admired him, merely for that very rigidity, which appealed to her as being masculine and strong. She despised him the more when she had discovered that the only motive able to bend the stiff back of his scrupulous theory and practice was the love of money, pure and simple. She did not believe that

he would have so derogated to save her life. The very arrogance of his manner showed how far he knew himself to be from his own ideal. He was trying to carry it through as a matter of right.

Katharine longed to confide in John Ralston. He was not so free as he had been in his idle days, a few months earlier. Having accepted a position, he was determined to do his best, and he stayed down town every day as long as there was the least possibility of finding anything which he could do in the bank.

Not long after the last-recorded interview with Katharine, Alexander Junior, being down town, had some reason to speak of a matter of business with the senior partner in Beiman Brothers', and entered the bank early in the afternoon. It was a vast establishment on the ground floor, a few steps above the level of the street. Being a place where there was much going and coming and active work, the office had not the air of icily polished perfection which characterized the inner fane of the Trust Company. The counters and seats were dark, and rubbed smooth with use, like the floor; the doors were worn with constant handling, but moved easily and noiselessly on their hinges. The brass gratings and rails were bright with long years of daily leathering. Everything was large, strong, and workmanlike, as a big engine, which is well kept but gets very little rest. There was the low,

breathing, softly shuffling sound in the air, which is heard where many are busy and no one speaks a superfluous word.

Alexander Lauderdale passed through the great outer office and caught sight of John Ralston, bending over some writing at a small desk by himself. Ralston was at that time between five and six and twenty years of age, a wiry, lean young man, with a dark face. There was more restlessness than strength in the expression, perhaps, but there was no lack of energy, a quality which, when it does not find vent in a congenial activity, is apt to produce a look of discontent. Possibly, too, there might be a dash of Indian blood in the Ralston family. There was certainly none in the Lauderdale's. John's bright brown eyes were turned upon his work, as Alexander passed near him, but glanced up quickly a moment later and saw him. A look of contempt darkened the young man's features like a shadow, and was instantly gone again. The two men had not exchanged half a dozen words in eighteen months. The brown eyes went back to the page, and the sinewy, nervous hand went on writing, and the straight, smooth hair on the top of Ralston's head, as he bent over the desk, became again the most prominent object, for its extreme blackness, in that part of the office.

Alexander Junior was ushered into the elder Mr. Beman's private room, by a grave young man in a

jacket with gilt buttons. The name of Lauderdale was a passport in any place of business in the city.

"By the way," he said, after exchanging a few words about the matter which had brought him there, "you've taken back that young cousin of ours, Jack Ralston. How's the fellow getting on?"

"Ralston? Oh, yes — Mr. Lauderdale wanted him to try again — yes — well, he's doing pretty well, I'm told. But they tell me he can't do anything, though he wants to. Praiseworthy, though, very praiseworthy, to try and work, when he's sure to have plenty of money one of these days. I like the boy myself," added Mr. Beman, with slightly increasing interest. "He's got some good in him, somewhere, I'll be bound."

"Does he keep pretty steady?" enquired Alexander Junior. "You knew he drank, I suppose?"

"Drinks!" exclaimed Mr. Beman, rather incredulously. "Nonsense — don't believe it."

Mr. Beman hated society, and spent many of his leisure hours in a club chiefly frequented by old gentlemen.

"Oh, no! It's quite true, I assure you. I thought you knew, or I wouldn't have mentioned it — being a relation. I hope he won't make a fool of himself, now that he's with you. Good morning."

"Good morning, my dear Lauderdale," answered the banker, cordially shaking hands.

Alexander left the bank and returned to his own office, questioning himself by the way concerning the right and wrong side of what he had just done, in undermining whatever confidence Mr. Beman might have in John Ralston. By dint of moral exertion, he succeeded in inducing his Scotch business instinct to admit that it was fair to warn an old friend if the habits of a young man he had lately taken into employment were not exactly what they should be. He resolutely closed his eyes to the fact that he had waited several days, until something had required that he should see the banker, in order to ask the careless question, and that, during all that time, Katharine's obstinacy had rankled in his brooding temper like an unreturned blow. He did not wish to think, either, that he had perpetrated a small act of indirect vengeance. He was very intent upon being conscientious — it would not do even to remember that any under-thoughts had floated through his brain beneath the current which he desired to see.

It was easy enough to forget it all, by merely allowing his mind to turn again to the question of his uncle's millions. That subject had a fascination which never palled. If he is to be excused at all for this and many other things which he subsequently did, his excuse must be stated now, or never.

Let this one fact be remembered, for the sake of

his humanity. He had spent the best years of his life in the inner office of a great Trust Company. That alone explains many things. Having originally been in moderate circumstances, he had been brought into daily contact for a long period with the process of hoarding money. He had seen how sums, originally insignificant, doubled and trebled themselves, and grew to fair dimensions by the simplest of all means, — by being kept locked up. He had not been by nature grasping, nor covetous of the goods of others in any inordinate degree, but he had that inborn craving for the actual money itself, for seeing it and touching it, and knowing where it is, which makes one small boy ask his father for a penny ‘to put by the side of the other,’ while his brother spends his mite on a sugar-plum, eats it, and runs off to play. Day by day, month by month, year by year, he had seen that putting of one penny by the side of the other going on under his eyes and personal supervision. It had been his duty to see that the pennies stayed where they were put. It is not strange that, with his temperament, he should have done for himself what he did for others. And with the doing of it came the habit of secrecy, which belongs to the miser’s passion, the instinctive denial of the possession, the mechanical and constantly recurring avowal of an imaginary poverty. All that came as surely as the dream of countless gold, to be

counted forever and ever, with the absolute certainty of never reaching the end, and as the nightmare of the empty safe, more real and terrible than the live horror of the waking man who comes home and finds that the wife he loves has left him.

He knew that hideous scene by heart. It visited him sometimes with no apparent cause. He knew how in the night — he always dreamed that it happened at night — he went to his own box in the Safe Deposit Vault, his own familiar box, as in reality he went regularly twice in every week. He felt the thrill of secret, heart-warming anticipation as he came near to it. His heart began to beat as it always did then, and only then, giving him a queer, breathless sensation which he loved, and that peculiar thirsty dryness in the throat. He turned the key, he pressed the spring, and out it came against his greedy, trembling hand — empty. At that point he awoke, clutching at the thin, tough chain by which the real key hung about his neck. His worst fear for years had been to dream that dream — his highest pleasure had been to go, after dreaming it, and find it false, the drawer full, all safe, the good United States Bonds filed away in dockets of a hundred thousand dollars each, untouched and unfingered.

He knew the fascination, the dumb horror, the soul-uplifting delight of a great passion, of one

which is said to be the last and greatest, if not the worst, that plays the devil's music on the wrung heartstrings of men. That is his only excuse for what he did. Dares humanity allege its humanity in extenuation of its humanity ?

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CHAPTER V.

BEFORE John Ralston had gone back to Beman Brothers', it had been easy enough for him and Katharine to meet in the course of the day, but the difficulties had increased unavoidably of late. Of course they saw each other in society, and as members of the same tribe they were often asked to the same parties, though that was by no means a matter of certainty. It was necessary to have a fixed understanding which should enable them to be sure of meeting and communicating with one another, and of knowing from day to day whether the next meeting were positively certain or not. John's hour for going down town was fixed, but the time of his returning was not. That depended on the amount of work there chanced to be for him at the bank, — sometimes more, sometimes less.

The habits of the Lauderdale household in Clinton Place were also very exact. Alexander Junior took charge, as it were, of the day, as soon as it appeared, and doled it out in portions. Breakfast was at half past eight, and he expected his wife and daughter to make their appearance in time to

see him at least finish the solid steak or brace of chops with which he fortified himself for work. His father always came down late, in order to be able to smoke as soon as he had finished eating, without annoying any one, for the old man seemed to subsist largely upon tobacco smoke and fresh milk — which is a strange mixture, but not unhealthy for those who are accustomed to it. That he smoked ‘Old Virginia Cheroots’ at two cents each, was his misfortune and not his fault. Practically he lived upon his son, for he had long ago given away everything he possessed, and even the old house had passed into Alexander’s hands — for a very moderate equivalent, which the philanthropist had already spent in advance upon the introduction of a new heating apparatus in his favourite asylum. Alexander Junior supplied him with the necessaries of life, and by almost imperceptible degrees of change had at last substituted the cheroots for the fine Havanas to which his father had been addicted in his comparative prosperity. From time to time the old man made a mild remark about the deterioration of cigars. The observations of his friends, after smoking one of his, were less mild. Alexander Senior attributed the change to the McKinley Bill. Alexander Junior did not smoke. He left the house every morning at a quarter past nine, before the fumigation had begun.

Katharine had always been free to go out for a

walk alone in the early hours since she had been considered to be grown up, and she took advantage of the privilege now in order to meet John Ralston. He was expected to be at the bank at half past nine, and, as it was near the Rector Street Station, he could calculate his time with precision if he found himself near a station of the elevated road.

He and Katharine had a simple system of signals. John came down to Clinton Place by the Sixth Avenue elevated, and got out at the corner. Thence he walked past the Lauderdalees' house to Fifth Avenue, and crossed Washington Square to South Fifth Avenue, by which he reached the Bleecker Street Station of the elevated railway. The usual place of meeting was on the south side of the Square. If Katharine were coming that morning there was something red in her window, a bit of ribbon, a red fan, or anything she chanced to pick up of the required colour. John could see it at a glance. He, on his part, let fall a few seeds or grains on the well-swept lower step of the house as he passed, to show that he had gone by. The convention was that the signal should consist of any kind of seed or grain. If, when she went out, there was nothing on the step, which very rarely happened, Katharine went back into the house and waited, easily finding an excuse if any one remarked her return, by alleging a mismatched pair of gloves, or a forgotten parasol or umbrella.

The system worked perfectly. Two or three grains of wheat, or rice, or rye, a couple of peppercorns, a little millet, varied daily, according to the supply John had in his pockets, and dropped near one end of the step, were all that was required, for it was rarely that more than a few minutes elapsed between their being deposited there and the moment when Katharine saw them. Generally, the sparrows had got them before any one else came out. The only person who ever noticed the frequent presence of seeds of some kind on the doorstep was the old philanthropist, who made illogical reflections upon the habits of the birds that brought them there, as he naturally supposed.

With regard to the place of meeting, the two changed it from time to time, or from day to day, as they thought best. Their minutes were counted, as John could not afford to be late at Beman Brothers', and sometimes they only exchanged a few words, agreeing to meet in the evening, or, since the spring had come, after John's business hours. Hitherto, they believed that none of their acquaintances had seen them, and they believed that none ever would. There seemed to be no reason why people they knew should be wandering in the purlieus and slums about South Fifth Avenue and Green Street, for instance, at nine o'clock in the morning. A few women in society patronized the little foreign shop in the Avenue, near the

Square, where artificial flowers were made, but if they ever went there themselves, it was much later in the day.

They met on the morning after Alexander Junior had spoken to Mr. Beman about John. The latter was standing before the church on the south side of Washington Square, puffing at the last end of a cigarette, when he saw Katharine's figure, clad, as usual, in grey homespun, emerging from one of the walks which ended opposite to him. The colour came a little to her face as she caught sight of him.

She walked quickly, and began to speak before she reached him.

"Oh Jack! I do so want to see you!" She held out her hand as he lifted his hat.

Their hands remained clasped a second longer, perhaps, than if they had been mere acquaintances, and their eyes were still meeting when their hands had parted.

"Yes — so do I," answered Ralston, with small regard for grammar. "You look tired, dear. What is it?"

"It's this life — I don't know how much longer I can stand it," answered Katharine, and they began to walk on.

"Has anything happened? Has your father been teasing you again?" John asked, quickly.

"Oh, yes! He leaves me no peace. It's a succession of pitched battles whenever we meet. He's

made up his mind to know what uncle Robert said to me, and I've made up mine that he shan't. What can I do? Why, Jack, I wouldn't even tell you!"

"I don't want to know," answered Ralston. "Uncle Robert isn't going to die for twenty years, and I hope he may live thirty. Of course, when he dies, if we're alive, we shall have heaps of money all round, and your father and grandfather will probably get the biggest shares. But there'll be plenty for us all. Your father seems to me to have lost his head about it."

"He really has. It's the same thing every day. He tells me that I'm all kinds of things — undutiful, and impertinent, and intolerable — altogether a perfect fiend, according to him. Then he threatens me — "

"Threatens you?" repeated John, with a quick frown and a change of tone. "He'd better not!"

"Well — he says that he'll find means to make me speak, and that sort of thing. I don't see myself what means he has at his command, I'm sure. I suppose when he's angry he doesn't know what he's saying. So I try to smile — but I don't like it."

"I should think not! But as you say, he can't really do anything except talk. He's permanently angry, though. He came into the bank yesterday and passed near me. I saw his face."

John added no comment, but his tone expressed well enough what he felt.

"I know," answered Katharine. "He always has that expression now,—one only used to see it now and then,—as though he meant to have something, if he had to kill somebody to get it. It's the strangest thing! He, who has always preached to me about keeping the secret of other people's confidence! It's perfectly incomprehensible! It's as though his whole nature had suddenly changed."

"He's wild to know how much he's to have," observed John, thoughtfully. "It attacked him when they expected uncle Robert to die. And now that he knows that you know, he means to wring it out of you. I hate him. I should like to wring his neck."

"Jack!"

"Oh, well—of course he's your father, and I'm very sorry for expressing myself—all the same—" he finished his sentence inwardly. "At all events, he's got to treat you properly, or I shall interfere. This can't go on, you know."

"You, Jack dear? What could you do?"

"What could I do? Take you away from him, of course. I'm your husband. Don't forget that, Katharine."

"No, dear—I'm not likely to. But still—I don't see—nothing's changed, you know. The difficulties are just the same as they ever were."

"Yes. But the reasons are different. I can't allow you to suffer. You know that after all that trouble last winter my mother insisted on making over half the property to me. Of course things go on just as they did, and we share everything. But I've got it all the same — six thousand a year, if I choose to call it my own. The reason why we don't tell everybody that we're married is, first, because it would make such an incredible row in the family, and secondly, because, as my mother and I have so little between us, she would have to reduce ever so many things if we set up at house-keeping with her, until I can make something. As long as you're happy at home, that's all very well. We're young enough to wait six months or a year, though we don't like it, and I'm going in for earning the respect of the Beman Brethren — they're really awfully nice to me, I must say. Anything more ignorant than I am you can't imagine!"

"Never mind, Jack — you're learning, at all events," said Katharine, in an encouraging tone. "And I know, dear — I know how you care for me, and how brave you are to wait for the sake of what's nice to your mother —"

"Oh, don't talk of courage! It's what I ought to have done long ago, if I hadn't been a born loafer and idiot. But if things are going to be different since your beloved father has got this idea into his head, if he's going to torment you

perpetually, and make your life a burden, and call you bad names out of the prayer-book — that sort of thing, you know — why, then, we must just do it, that's all — just face the row, and the economies, and all, and you must come to my mother's."

"But, Jack — just think of what would happen — "

"Well — just think what's happening now. It's much worse, I'm sure, and if it's going to last, I shall just do it. My mother always says that she wishes we could be married. Well — we are married. There's nothing to be done but to tell her so. Besides, for her part, she'd be delighted. You don't know her! She's just like a man in some things. She'd put up with anything — boiled beef and cabbage, and a horse-car fare on Sundays by way of an outing. Only, of course, if it can possibly be helped, I don't want her to have to pinch and screw about her gloves, and her cabs, and the little things she likes and has had all her life. That's why I'm working. If I could only get a salary of two thousand a year, we could manage. I've figured it all out — it's just that two thousand that would make the difference — it's ridiculous, isn't it?"

"It's worse," said Katharine. "It's abominable."

"Yes — it's everything you like — or don't like, rather. But if you're going to suffer, we must do

as I say. I'll tell you how we'll manage it. You'll just go up to our house some morning about ten o'clock, and go out of town with my mother for a few days. I'll get a holiday from Beman's, and I'll go and see your mother and tell her, and then I'll go down town and face your father. His office is a nice, quiet place, I believe. He's nothing much to do but to be trusted, and he sits all day long by himself in the company's showcase, and people trust him. That's his profession. He represents the moral side of business. Once I've told him, I'll disappear for a while,—going to you, of course,—and we three will come back together and tell the world that we've been quietly married — which is quite true. Lots of people do that nowadays to get out of the expense and fuss of a dress parade wedding. How does that strike you?"

"Oh, it's clever enough, and brave of you — as you always are — to be ready to face the parents alone. We shall have to do something of the kind in the end, you know, because we can't be married over again. Uncle Robert suggested the same sort of plan last winter; only he wanted us to go to his place up the river, and he was going to ask the whole family. The dear old man forgot that his servants would remember for the rest of their lives that there had been no marriage service. It wasn't practical."

"By the bye, where's our marriage certificate?"

asked John, suddenly. "You took it, you know. You never told me what became of it."

"Oh, uncle Robert said he'd keep it with his papers. I suppose it's as safe there as anywhere. Still—if he were to die—"

"It's all right, if he's kept it. It will be in a safe place, properly endorsed. As he's the only person who knows the secret, he'd much better keep it, and he's not at all likely to die now that he's recovered. I'd been meaning to ask you for ever so long. But to go back—if things get any worse, or go on as badly as they're going now, do you see any possible objection to doing what I propose?"

"Well, the principal objection is that it will hamper your mother, Jack. I'd rather suffer a great deal more than I'm likely to, than thrust myself upon her. I know—you'll tell me that she's very fond of me and wants to see us married, and I know she's in earnest about it and means every word she says. But I've lived in a rigidly economical household, as they call it. I know what it means, and it would be very difficult for any one who's never been used to it. Don't think about it, dear. Please don't. You know I come to you with all my little woes—but you mustn't take them too seriously. You'll prevent me from speaking freely if you do, dear."

"It's my business to take your happiness seri-

ously. I'm not prepared to stand the idea of having your life made miserable on my account."

"But it isn't about you, Jack. It's altogether about the question of uncle Robert's will."

"Never mind. I won't have you made unhappy by anybody, do you understand? I've got the right of loving you, and the right of being your husband, and if that isn't enough I'll take the right. I'm in earnest, Katharine."

He stood still on the pavement; she stopped, also, and faced him.

"Yes, dear; I know and I thank you," she said, gently. "But it really isn't as bad as I made out. I'm irritated, and I want to be with you all the time, and then the least little thing seems so much bigger than it is. Please, please don't do anything rash, Jack, or without telling me just what you're going to do! You know you are rash, dear—I'm always a little afraid of what you may do when you're angry."

"I certainly shan't be rash where you're concerned," answered Ralston. "You're too much to me—we are to each other—and we mustn't risk anything. But don't imagine, either, that if anything goes wrong I shan't know it, even if you won't tell me. I can guess what you think of from your face, you know—I've often done it."

"That's true—I'm sure I couldn't conceal anything from you for long," answered Katharine, womanly wise.

She was concealing something from him at that very moment, something which she had meant to tell him, and would have told him, had he not spoken so decidedly of what he meant to do if her life were made unhappy. But she knew that he was quite capable of doing anything which he said he would do, no matter how rash. When she had at first spoken, she had not altogether realized how he would take up the question of her present unhappiness as a matter for immediate and decisive action. She loved him all the better for it, but she began to understand how careful she must be in future.

John paused a moment after his last speech, and looked into her grey eyes. Perhaps some little doubt assailed him as to whether, if she tried, she could not, perhaps, keep from him something he wished to know — the doubt from which men who love are very rarely quite free.

"But promise me, Katharine," he said, presently, "promise me that if you are really suffering you will tell me, instead of just leaving me to guess."

"Ah — you see!" She laughed softly and happily. "You're not so sure as you thought! Oh, yes — I'll tell you if anything dreadful happens."

"You'd better!" Ralston laughed, too, out of sheer delight at being with her, and his laugh pleased her, for it came rarely. "And about your father — I'll tell you what I think. His excite-

ment will cool down as he sees that uncle Robert's getting better, and he'll leave you alone. You see, he'll be afraid that you'll go to uncle Robert and say that you're being tormented to give up his secret. And then uncle Robert will descend upon Clinton Place and make a raid and raise Cain—and there'll be something to pay all round and no pitch particularly hot. Do you see?"

Katharine laughed again, but she understood that what he said was reasonable enough.

"Now I must be going," said Ralston. "I'm so angry about it all that I'm on the verge of being funny, which isn't in my line. Can you come to-morrow? Is there any chance of seeing you to-night?"

"I don't know. There's a little thing at the Vanbrughs'—are you going?"

"Not asked, worse luck!"

"Then I won't go. How stupid of them not to ask you. I suppose you haven't been near them for months. Have you? Confess!"

"How can I do the card-leaving business now that I'm down town all day? It isn't fair on a man. Besides, the Vanbrughs needn't be so particular. She's nice, though—much nicer since she's given up Sunday-schooling. The last time we talked she knew all about the universe and the Bab faith and the life everlasting—and she was telling everybody. She hates me because I laughed. By Jove!"

I must be going, though. To-morrow, then? As usual. I say, Katharine—if you get a chance to give your father the sharp answer that wrath particularly dislikes, I hope you will—and tell me about it. Good-bye, sweetheart—only sixteen minutes to get to the bank!"

"You did it in fourteen and a half last week, Jack," answered Katharine, holding his hand.

"Yes—but I just caught the train—I wouldn't do it at all, if I could help it, you know."

"Of course not—I mustn't be selfish. Run, dear—and good-bye!"

In a moment he was gone. She watched his wiry, elastic movements as he ran at the top of his speed towards the station of the elevated, to the vicinity of which they had directed their walk while they had been talking. As he disappeared, flying up the covered iron stairs, two steps at a time, she turned and walked briskly homeward. The neighbourhood is a safe and quiet one, though it is largely inhabited by foreigners, but she did not care to slacken her pace till she got back to Washington Square. Then she moved more slowly.

The spring was in the air and the sun was bright. She sauntered leisurely through the walks, wondering what the coming summer was to bring forth for her, and all the months after people began to go away. And she thought all the time of Ralston. It seemed such an absurd and senseless thing that

they two, who were to be one day among the richest, and would be masters of all that the world can give to people not endowed with what is not in the world's gift or market — that they two, being lawfully and christianly married, should be forced to meet by stealth for a few moments, to be separated again almost immediately by the necessity which drove John every day to his desk as a junior clerk in Mr. Beman's employment. A week — a year — ten years, if uncle Robert lived so long — and then, if John went into the bank, the clerks, who were all his seniors, would lift their pens from the paper in the middle of a word to watch the representative of so much wealth go by. And old Mr. Beman would rise from his seat and offer Twenty-Five Millions a chair, as though he were a man of years and weight. Not but that the Bemans and John's fellow-clerks, some of whom were acquaintances in his own world and beginning their life as he was, were all well aware that he had a good chance of getting something handsome in the end. But mere potential wealth is too common in the neighbourhood of Wall Street to be noticed or much respected. It is not the man who may have it, but the man who has it, who commands respect. Even the only son, the man who is sure to get it if he lives, is treated with a certain indifference. But when time has brought down his heavy hand upon the millionaire, and crushed him into the

earth-darkness and his memory into a bit of stone with his name on it, when the last well-greased screw has been run into the polished coffin, when the black horses have waved their black plumes and the last carriage that followed the funeral is being washed down in the coach-house yard — then the man who is next stops, and lets future run ahead of him and himself becomes present fact, strong, gorgeous, worshipful. For at his mighty nod the wilderness may become real estate, or the secret places of Nassau Street and Exchange Place may be hideous with the groaning of the bulls he has beared out of the ring — and the solid security may to-morrow be wild-cat if he wills it, and the wild-cat emerge in the dawn with a gilt edge and an honest countenance, to be a joyful investment for the widow's mite.

Meanwhile, Jack was nobody down town. His cousin Hamilton Bright, who was a junior partner in Beman Brothers', was a vastly more important person than he. For he had behind him what Ralston had before him, and a fair amount of capital in the present, besides. It was all very ridiculous, Katharine thought, and depended on the false state of society in which she was obliged to live.

She thought bitterly of her father. He was a prominent figure in that false state — a man of fine principles and opportunist practice — she

had caught the latter expression from Walter Crowdie, Bright's brother-in-law, the well-known painter, who had painted a portrait of her during the winter, and who, as the husband of a distant cousin, was counted in the Lauderdale tribe.

Her father, she thought, preached, prayed—and then acted far worse than average people who prayed little and sat still to be preached at on Sundays, in order that Providence might have a sort of weekly photograph of their souls, so to say, and because others did the same and it was expected of them. She and her father had never agreed very well, and had come into open conflict about John Ralston; but hitherto she had respected him for his uncompromising, unashamed piety. There had seemed to her to be something masculine and bold about it, and such as it was, she had believed in it. It had been far from being an idol, but it had been a very creditable statue, so to say, and now, on a sudden, the head had been knocked off it, and she saw, or thought she saw, that it was hollow and a sham. She was too young yet to admit the presence of good in the same place with evil, and the evil itself had been thrown directly in her path as a stumbling-block for herself, and in the hope that she might fall over it.

And as though it were not enough to torment her perpetually with questions, there was that other thing which she had just concealed from

John, because he had been so angry about the first. Her father and mother were apparently determined that she should be married before the summer was out, and were thrusting a match upon her in a way of which she would not have believed them capable. Ever since her mother had discovered that she was losing her beauty and that Katharine received three-fourths of all the admiration which had once been hers, the relations of the two had been changed. Mrs. Lauderdale was constantly between two conflicting emotions, which almost amounted to passions,—her real affection for Katharine, and her detestable envy of the girl's freshness and youth. She was a good woman, and she despised herself more than any one else could possibly have despised her, for wishing that she might not be daily compared with her, handicapped, as she was, with nearly twenty years more to carry. To marry her daughter was to remove her from home, and perhaps from New York—and with her, to do away with the foundation of envy, the cause of the offence, the visible temptation to the sin which was destroying the elder woman's happiness and undermining her peace of mind. Mrs. Lauderdale, whose sins had hitherto been few and pardonable, felt that if Katharine were once away, she should become again a good woman, and find courage to bear the terrible loss of her once supreme beauty.

For she was keenly alive to the wickedness of what she felt, though she could not quite understand it. No man could boast that he had ever had a meaning look or an over-sympathetic pressure of the hand from Mrs. Lauderdale, during the five and twenty years of her married life, though she had loved society intensely, and enjoyed its amusements with a real innocence of which not every woman in her position would have been capable. But no man who had laid eyes upon her could boast — and it would have been a poor boast — that he had turned away at the first glance, without looking again and wondering at her loveliness, and saying to himself that Mrs. Lauderdale was one of the most beautiful women he had ever seen.

It hurt her bodily to miss those eyes turned upon her from all sides, as she began to miss them now. It hurt her still more — and in spite of secret prayers and solemn resolutions and litanies of self-contempt, she turned pale with quiet, deadly anger against the world — when, as she entered a crowded room with Katharine, she felt, as well as saw, that those same eyes sought the pale, severe face of the dark-haired young girl, and overlooked her own fading perfection. The stately rose was drooping, just as the sweet white summer myrtle burst the bud.

Let her not be judged too harshly, if she longed

to be separated from Katharine just at that time. There was no ill-will, nothing like hatred, no touch of cruelty in the simple desire to be spared that daily contrast. It was rather that wish which many have felt, despairing of grace and strength to resist temptation, to have the cause of it removed, that they may find peace. A worse woman would not so long have been satisfied with beauty alone, and with compelling by her mere presence the admiration of a crowd in which no one face was dearer than the rest, nor than it should be.

She longed with all her heart to see Katharine married, as her husband did from very different reasons. Nor were his arguments bad or unkind from his point of view. He feared lest she should marry Ralston in spite of him, and he honestly believed Ralston to be a worthless young fellow, who could make no woman happy. As for his daughter, he was attached to her, fond of her, perhaps, in his cold way; though loving with him seemed to be a negative affair and not able to go much further than a cessation of fault-finding, except for his wife, who had overcome him and kept him by her beauty alone. It was not until Katharine aroused the deep-seated passion of his unsatisfied avarice that he ceased to be kind to her, as he understood kindness.

CHAPTER VI.

KATHARINE was in her room that afternoon towards five o'clock, when a servant knocked at her door, disturbing her as she was composing a letter to her best friend, Hester Crowdie. She looked up with an expression of annoyance as the door opened and the maid entered.

"Oh — what's the matter?" she asked, impatiently striking the point of her pen upon the edge of the glass inkstand.

"Mr. Wingfield's downstairs, Miss Katharine," answered the girl.

"Oh — is he? Well — "

Katharine tapped her pen thoughtfully upon the glass again, and a quick contraction of the brow betrayed her displeasure.

"Shall I tell the gentleman that you'll be down, Miss Katharine?" enquired the other.

"No, Annie. Tell him I'm out. That is — I'm not out, am I?"

"No, Miss Katharine."

Katharine let her pen fall, rose and went to the window in hesitation. The bit of red ribbon which had served as a signal to John was pinned

to the small curtain stretched over the lower sash. She looked at it thoughtfully, and forgot Mr. Wingfield for a moment.

"Shall I show the gentleman into the library, Miss Katharine?" asked Annie, in an insinuating tone.

"Oh, well! Yes," said Katharine, turning suddenly. "Tell Mr. Wingfield that I'll be down in a few minutes, if he doesn't mind waiting. I suppose I've got to," she added, audibly, before Annie was well out of the room.

She glanced at herself in the looking-glass, but without interest. Then she slipped her unfinished letter into the drawer of the little writing-table by the window, at which she had been sitting, and turned towards the door. But before she left the room she paused, hesitated, and then went back to the table, locking the drawer and withdrawing the key, which she slipped behind the frame of an engraving. She had become unreasonably distrustful of late.

Instead of going down to the library, she knocked at the door of her mother's morning room. It chanced that Mrs. Lauderdale was at home that afternoon, which was unusual in fine weather. Mrs. Lauderdale was sitting by the window at the table she used for her miniature painting. She had talent, and had been well taught in her girlhood, and her work was dis-

tinctly good. Amateurs more often succeed with miniature than in any other branches of art. It is harder to detect faults when the scale of the whole is very minute.

Mrs. Lauderdale was bending over a piece of work she had lately begun. All the little things she used were lying about her on the wooden table, the tiny brushes, the saucers for colours, the needle-pointed pencils. She looked up as Katharine entered, and the latter saw all the lines in the still beautiful face accentuated by the earnest attention given to the work. The eyelids were contracted and tired, the lips drawn in, one eyebrow was raised a little higher than the other, so that there were fine, arched wrinkles in the forehead immediately over it. The faces of American women of a certain age, when the complexion is fair, favour the formation of a multitude of very delicate crossing and recrossing lines, not often seen in the features of other nationalities.

"What is it, child?" asked Mrs. Lauderdale, quietly, with her soft southern intonation.

"Mr. Wingfield's there again," answered Katharine, with unmistakable disgust.

"Well, my dear, go down and see him," said Mrs. Lauderdale, blandly. "Did you send word that you'd receive?"

"Yes. I'm going to tell him not to come any more."

Katharine went behind the table, so that she faced her mother and looked directly into her eyes. For several seconds neither spoke.

"I hope you won't do anything so rude," said Mrs. Lauderdale at last, without avoiding the gaze that met hers. "We all like Mr. Wingfield very much."

"I daresay. I'm not finding fault with him, nor his looks, nor his manners, nor anything."

"Well, then — I don't see —"

"Oh, yes, you do, mother, — forgive my contradicting you, — you know very well that he wants to marry me, and that you want me to marry him. But I don't mean to. So I shall tell him, as nicely as I can, to give up the idea, and to make his visits to you, and not to me."

"But, Katharine, dear — nobody wishes to force you to marry him. We don't live in the Middle Ages, you know."

"There's a resemblance," answered Katharine, bitterly.

"Katharine! How can you say anything so unjust!"

"Because it's true, mother. I'm not blind, you know, and I'm not perfectly insensible. I see, and I can feel. You don't seem to think it's possible to hurt me — and I don't think you mean to hurt me, as papa does."

"You're quite out of your mind, my child!"

Your father loves you dearly. He wouldn't hurt you for the world. Don't talk such nonsense, Katharine. Go and see Mr. Wingfield, and be decently civil for half an hour—he won't stay even as long as that. Besides, you can't tell him not to come any more. He hasn't asked you to marry him. You may think he means to, but you can hardly take it for granted like that."

"No, but he means to ask me to-day," answered Katharine. "And I haven't encouraged him in the least."

"Then how do you know?"

"Oh—one can always tell."

"It's not exactly true to say that you've not encouraged him," said Mrs. Lauderdale, thoughtfully. "He's been here very often of late, and you've danced the cotillion with him twice, at least. Then there was his coaching party—only the other day—and you sat beside him. He's always sending you flowers, and books, and things, too. It isn't fair to say that he's had no encouragement. You'll get the reputation of being a flirt if you go on in this way."

"I'd rather be called a flirt than marry Archibald Wingfield," replied Katharine.

"At all events you might have some consideration for him, if you've none for yourself. Don't be foolish, Katharine dear. Take my advice. Of course, if you could take a fancy to him, quite

naturally, we should all be very glad. I like him — I can't help it. He's so handsome, and has such good manners, and speaks French like a Parisian. I know — you may laugh — but in these days, when people are abroad half the time — and then, after all, my dear, you certainly can't be really sure that he means to ask you to-day. Very likely he won't, just because you think he's going to."

"Of course, mother, you know that's absurd! As though it wasn't evident — besides, those flowers this morning. Didn't you see them?"

"What about them? He often sends you flowers."

"Why, the box was all full of primroses, and just two roses — extraordinary ones — lying in the middle and tied together with a bit of grass. Imagine doing such a thing! And I know he tied them himself, on account of the knot. He's a yachting man, and doesn't tie knots like the men at the flower shops."

"Oh, well, my dear — if you are going to judge a man by the way he ties knots —"

Mrs. Lauderdale laughed as she broke off in her incomplete sentence. Then her face grew grave all at once.

"Take my advice, my child — marry him," she said, bending over her table once more and taking up a little brush, as though she wished to end the interview.

"Certainly not!" answered Katharine, in a tone which discouraged further persuasion.

Mrs. Lauderdale sighed.

"Well—I don't know what you young girls expect," she said, in a tone of depression. "Mr. Wingfield's young, good-looking, well-educated, rich, and he adores you. Perhaps you don't love him precisely, but you can't help liking him. You act as though you were always expecting a fine, irresistible, mediæval passion to come and carry you off. It won't, you know. That sort of thing doesn't happen any more. When you want to get married at last, you'll be too old. You have your choice of almost any of them. For a girl who has no money and isn't likely to have much for a long time, I don't know any one who's more surrounded than you are. Of course I want you to marry. I don't believe in waiting till you're twenty-five or thirty."

"I don't intend to."

"Well, you will, my dear, unless you make up your mind soon. It's all—"

"Mother," interrupted Katharine, "you know very well that I've made my choice, and that I mean to stand by it."

"Oh—Jack Ralston, you mean?" Mrs. Lauderdale affected a rather contemptuous indifference. "That was a foolish affair. Girls always fall in love with their cousins. You'll forget all about

him, and I'm sure he's forgotten all about you. He hardly ever comes to the house now. Besides, you never could have married poor Jack, with his dissipated habits, and no money. Uncle Robert doesn't mean to leave him anything. He'd gamble it all away."

"You called me unjust a moment ago," said Katharine, in an altered voice, and growing pale.

"Of course — you take his part. It's no use to discuss it —"

"It's not discussion to abuse a man who's bravely doing his best. Jack doesn't need any one to take his part. Do you know that he's altogether given up his old life at the club — and all that? He's at Beman Brothers' all day long, and when you don't see him in society, he's quietly at home with cousin Katharine."

"Yes — I heard he was doing a little better. But he'll never get rid of the reputation he's given himself. My dear, you don't seem to remember that poor Mr. Wingfield is waiting for you all this time downstairs."

"It will be the last time, at all events," answered Katharine, in a low voice. "I'll never see him alone again."

She turned from her mother towards the door. Mrs. Lauderdale followed her with her eyes for a moment, then rose swiftly and overtook her before she could let herself out.

"Katharine — I won't let you send Mr. Wingfield away like that!" said Mrs. Lauderdale, in a quick, decided tone.

"Won't let me?" repeated Katharine, slowly.

"No — certainly not. It's quite out of the question — you really mustn't do it!" Mrs. Lauderdale was becoming agitated.

"Do you mean that it's out of the question for me to refuse to marry Mr. Wingfield?" Katharine had her back against the door and her right hand upon the knob of the lock.

"Oh — well — no. Of course you have the right to refuse him, if he asks you in so many words —"

"Of course I have! What are you thinking of?" There was a look of something between indignation and amusement in her face.

"Yes — but there are so many ways, child. Katharine," she continued, almost appealingly, "you can't just say 'no' and tell him to stop coming — you'll change your mind — you don't know what a nice young fellow he is —"

Katharine's hand dropped from the door-handle, and she folded her arms as she faced her mother.

"What is all this?" she asked, deliberately and with emphasis. "You seem to me to be very excited. I should almost fancy that you had something else in your mind, though I can't understand what it is."

"No — no; certainly not. It's only for your

sake and his," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, hurriedly. "I've known it happen so often that a girl refuses a man just because she's in a temper about something, and then — afterwards, you know — she regrets it, when it's too late, and the man has married some one else out of spite."

"How strangely you talk!" exclaimed Katherine, gazing at her mother in genuine surprise.

"My dear, I only don't want you to do anything rash and unkind. You spoke as though you meant to be as hard and cold as a mill-stone — as though he'd done something outrageous in wanting to marry you."

"Not at all. I said that I should refuse him and beg him to stop coming to see me. There's nothing particularly like a mill-stone in that. It's the honest truth in the first place — for I won't marry him, and you can't force me to — "

"But nobody thinks of forcing you — "

"I don't know. Perhaps not," answered the young girl, doubtfully. "But it's of no use, for I won't. And as for telling him not to come — why, it's rather natural, I think. It just makes the refusal a little more definite. I don't like that way girls have of refusing a man once a month, and letting him come to see them for a whole season, and then marrying him after all. There's something mean about it — and I don't think much of the man who lets himself be treated in that way,

either. If Mr. Wingfield is really all you say he is, he may not be just that kind, and he'll understand and take his refusal like a gentleman, and not torment me any more. But it's just as well to make sure."

"Promise me that you'll be kind to him, Katharine — "

"Kind? Oh, yes — I'll be kind enough. I'll be perfectly civil — "

"Well — what shall you say to him? That you like him, and hope to be good friends, but that you don't feel — "

"Dear mother!" exclaimed Katharine, with perfect simplicity, "I've refused men before. I know how to do it."

"Yes — of course — but Mr. Wingfield — "

"You've got Mr. Wingfield on the brain, mother!" She laughed a little scornfully. "One would think that you were his mother, and were begging me to be kind and nice and marry your son. I don't understand you to-day. Meanwhile, he's waiting."

"One moment, child!" exclaimed Mrs. Lauderdale, laying her hand on Katharine's as it went out towards the knob of the door. "You don't know — there are particular — well, there are so many reasons why you shouldn't be rough with him. Can't you just say that you're touched by his proposal and will think it over?"

"Certainly not!" cried Katharine, indignantly. "Why should I keep the poor man hanging on when I don't mean to marry him — when I won't — I've said it often enough, I'm sure. Why should I?"

"It would be so much easier for him, if you would — to please me, darling child," continued Mrs. Lauderdale, in an almost imploring way, "just to please me! I don't often ask you to do anything for me, do I, dear? And you're not like Charlotte — we've always been such good friends, love. And now I ask you this one thing for myself. It isn't much, I'm sure — just to say that you'll think it over. Won't you? I know you will — there's a dear girl!"

Mrs. Lauderdale bent her head affectionately and kissed Katharine on the cheek. The young girl tried to draw back, but finding herself against the door, could only turn her face away as much as possible. She did not understand her mother's manner, and she did not like it.

"But it's only a moment ago that you were talking about my acting like a flirt!" she objected, vehemently. "If it isn't flirting to give a man hope when there is none, what is?"

"No, dear; that's not flirting; it's only prudence. You may like him better by and by, and I should be so glad! Flirting is drawing a man on as you've done with him, and then throwing him over cruelly and all at once."

"I've not drawn him on, mother! You shan't say that I ever encouraged him."

"I don't know. You've accepted his flowers and his books —"

"What was I to do? Send them back?"

"You might have told him not to send so many, and so often; you needn't have read the books. He'd have seen that you didn't care."

"Oh, this is ridiculous, you know!"

"No, it's not, my darling! And as for the flowers, of course you couldn't exactly send them back, but you weren't obliged to wear them."

"Nobody wears flowers now, so it wasn't probable that I should feel obliged to. Really, mother, you're losing your head!"

Mrs. Lauderdale shifted her position a little, moving towards the side of the door on which the lock was placed, and laying her hand affectionately on Katharine's, as though still to detain her.

"Yes," she said, "I'd forgotten that we don't wear flowers any longer. But that isn't the question, dear. I only ask you not to send him away suddenly, with a 'no' that can't possibly be taken back. I'm dreadfully afraid that you'll hurt the poor fellow, and I can't help feeling that he has reason — that you've given him reason to expect that you'll at least consider the question. Dear child, I only ask you this once. Won't you do it to please me? We're all so fond of Wingfield —"

"But why? why? If I don't mean to have him, how can I? I really can't understand. Is there any family reason for being so particular about Mr. Wingfield's feelings? We've never been so very intimate with his people."

"Reasons," repeated Mrs. Lauderdale, absently. "Reasons? Well, yes—but it isn't that—" She stopped short.

"Mother!" Katharine looked keenly into her face. "You've been talking to him yourself! I can see it in your eyes!"

"Oh, no!" answered Mrs. Lauderdale. "Oh, no—what makes you think that?"

But she looked away, and Katharine saw the blush of confusion rising under the transparent skin in her mother's cheek.

"Yes—you've given Mr. Wingfield to understand that I'm in love with him," said Katharine, in a low voice.

"Katharine, how can you!" Mrs. Lauderdale was making a desperate effort to recover herself, but she was a truthful woman, and found it hard to lie. "You've no right to say such things!"

"Yes—I see," answered Katharine, not heeding her. "It's all quite clear to me now. You and papa have drawn him on and encouraged him, and now you're afraid that I shall put you in an awkward position by sending him away. I see it all. That's the reason why you're so excited about it."

"Katharine, dear, don't accuse me of such things! All I said was—" She stopped short.

"Then you did say something? Of course. I knew that was the truth of it!"

"I said nothing," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, going back to a total denial. "Except, perhaps, we have given him to understand that we should be glad if you would marry him."

"We? Has papa been talking to him, too?" asked Katharine, indignantly.

"Don't be so angry, child. It's quite natural. You don't know how glad your father would be. It's just the sort of match he's always dreamed of for you. And then I think it was very honourable in young Wingfield, when he found that he was in love with you, to speak to your father first."

"Scrupulously! He might be French! He might have tried to find out first whether I cared for him at all. But I've no doubt you told him that he had only to ask and I should take him to my heart with pride and pleasure! Oh, mother, mother! You never used to act like this!"

"But, my dear child —"

"Oh no, — don't call me your dear child like that — it doesn't mean anything now. You're completely changed — no, don't keep me! That poor fellow's waiting all this time. You can't have anything more to say to me, for I know it

all. A word more — which you may have said to him, or a word less — what does it matter? You've turned on me, and now you're doing your best to marry me, just to get rid of me. As for papa, he leaves me no peace about poor uncle Robert's will. And he calls himself an honest man, when he's trying to force a confidence that doesn't belong to him, out of — yes — out of sheer love of money. Oh, it's not to be believed! Let me go, mother! I won't keep that man waiting any longer. It isn't decent. There'll be one lie less, at all events!"

"Katharine, dear! Stay a minute! Don't go when you're angry — like this!"

But Katharine's firm hand was opening the door in spite of her mother's gentle, almost timid, resistance.

"No — I'm not angry now," answered the young girl. "It's something different — I won't hurt him — never fear!"

In a moment she had left the room, and her mother heard the quick footfall on the stairs, as she stood listening by the open door. Mrs. Lauderdale had got herself into terrible trouble, and she knew it. Katharine had, in part, guessed rightly, for if Mrs. Lauderdale had not told young Wingfield in so many words that her daughter loved him, she had yet allowed him to think so, and had been guilty of a sin of omission in not

undeceiving him. There is a way of listening which means assent, as there is a way of assenting in words which mean a flat refusal. Alexander Lauderdale had gone farther. He had distinctly told Wingfield, in his wife's presence, that he had no reason to believe that his daughter might not,—he saved his scrupulous conscience by the 'might,'—might not ultimately accept a proposal which was so agreeable to his own wishes. Mrs. Lauderdale had been shocked, for, as it was spoken, the phrase sounded very untrue, though when precipitated upon paper and taken to pieces, it is found to be cautious enough. 'Might,' not 'would'—and 'ultimately,' not by any means at the first attempt. Yet the impression had been conveyed to Wingfield's mind that Katharine was predisposed in his favour, in spite of the reports which had so long been circulated about her engagement to Ralston. Mrs. Lauderdale had, for a moment, almost believed that her husband had told an untruth. But on talking the matter over with him, his dignity of manner, his clear recollection of his own words, and the moderate stress which he laid upon the 'might' and the 'ultimately,' not only reassured her, but persuaded her to say almost the same thing the next time she saw Wingfield. The young fellow always sought her out at a party, and confided to her all he felt for Katharine, and Mrs. Lauderdale sympathized

with him, as she had once sympathized with Jack Ralston, unconscious that she was doing anything wrong. He was handsome, frank, and winning, and she longed to see Katharine married. The reasons were plenty. Many cold and good women enjoy being made the confidantes of young lovers. The atmosphere of the passion is agreeable to them, though they may know little of the passion itself. Mrs. Lauderdale had not fully realized the meaning of what she had been doing until Katharine made it plain to her that afternoon. And then, although her conscience told her that she was in the wrong, and though she had spoken to the girl entreatingly and gently, she became angry with her as soon as she was left to herself. The tortuousness of a good woman's mind when she has hurt her own conscience surpasses by many degrees that of an ordinary criminal's straightforwardly bad ingenuity.

Meanwhile, Katharine descended to the library, paused a moment in the entry, and then opened the door. Archibald Wingfield's black eyes met her as she entered the room. He was standing before the empty fireplace, with his hands behind him, warming them perhaps at an imaginary fire, for they were cold. He was very much in love with her, and Katharine's girlish instinct was right, for he had come with the determined purpose of asking her to be his wife. She had kept

him waiting fully twenty minutes, and during that time he had interpreted the delay in at least as many different ways. As she came in, the colour rose in his brown cheeks and his heart beat fast.

Archibald Wingfield was said to be the handsomest young man in New York society, which is saying a good deal, notwithstanding those captious persons who write and speak sarcastically about the round-shouldered, in-kneed, flabby-cheeked youth of the present day. Of late years, during the growth of what is now the young generation in society, there has been a very sudden improvement in the race and type of boys and girls. Any one can see that who does not wilfully close his eyes.

Wingfield stood fully six feet four inches without his shoes, was broad-shouldered, deep-chested, and thin-waisted as a young Achilles. His feet were narrow, strong, and straight, his legs those of a runner rather than a walker, his hands broad and brown, with great, determined-looking thumbs, marked sinews, and the high, blue veins of a thorough-bred animal. The splendid form was topped by a small, energetic head, with slightly aquiline features, the clean-shaven lips that made a bold, curved, bow-like mouth, flat, healthy, brown cheeks, a well-rounded chin, deepened in the middle with the depression which is nature's hall-mark on superior physical beauty — a moderately full fore-

head, very small ears, jet black, short, smooth hair, and wide, honest black eyes with rough black eyebrows. Under the brown colour there was rich blood, that mantled like scarlet velvet in summer's dusk.

He spoke in a low, self-possessed, unaffected voice, with an English accent, common enough to-day among young men who have been much abroad during their education. Wingfield had been at Christ Church, had got his degree in the ordinary course, and was hesitating as to his future career between the law, for which he was now reading, and a country life of gentleman farming and horse-breeding in western New York, which attracted him. His people were all rich, all good-looking, and all happy. His ideals were chiefly in his own family. When he had returned from England, he had been something of a hero among the young, owing to his having pulled five in the Oxford boat when the latter had won the University race in the previous spring, a very unusual distinction for a foreign-born athlete in England. With his great height, he was still proud of having trained to twelve stone eleven for the race.

In the matter of outward advantages John Ralston's spare figure and lean, Indian face could not compare favourably with such a man as Archibald Wingfield. Nor had Wingfield's reputation borne the strain and the shocks which John's had barely

survived. The man seemed born to success, happiness and popularity, as many of his family had been successful, popular and happy before him. He himself believed that all he needed in order to be happier than any of them was to get Katherine Lauderdale's consent to be his wife. And he loved her so much, and was so nervous in the anticipation of what was to come, that his hands had turned cold, his healthy heart was bouncing like a football in his big chest, the blood rushed to his brown cheeks, and he almost dropped his silk hat as she entered the room.

"How do you do, Miss Lauderdale?"

He came forward with a gigantic stride, and then suddenly made a short little step, as he found himself already close to her.

"How do you do?" she asked, quietly repeating the inane question we have adopted as a form of greeting and recognition.

She looked up—far up, it seemed to her—into his brilliant black eyes, and understood how much in earnest he was, before he said anything more. Vaguely, as in a dream, she remembered how, several months earlier, in that very room and almost at that very hour, John Ralston had come to her and she had persuaded him to make her his wife.

"Thank you so much for the flowers," she said, sitting down in her favourite little arm-chair on one side of the empty fireplace.

He murmured in a pleased but incoherent fashion as he pushed a chair into a convenient position and sat down—not too near her—setting his hat upon the floor beside him. He rested his two elbows on his knees, and his chin on his folded hands, and looked at her with unblushing, boyish admiration.

"But please don't send me any more flowers, Mr. Wingfield," said Katharine, going straight to the point by an effort of will.

A puzzled look came into his face instantly. His hands dropped upon his knees, and he sat upright in his chair.

"Why not?" he asked, simply. "I mean," he added, fancying he had put the question roughly, "is it rude to ask why not? It gives me so much pleasure—if you like them a little, you know."

It hurt Katharine to see the simplicity of the man, and it made her face burn to think that he had been played upon.

"Because I'd rather not," she answered, very gently.

"I—I don't think I quite understand," said Wingfield, with some hesitation. "I know—you often say that I mustn't send them so much—but then, you know, one always says that, doesn't one? It doesn't seem to mean anything except a sort of second 'thank you'—"

"I mean more than that," said Katharine, smiling faintly, in spite of herself.

"But so do I!" exclaimed the young man. "I mean so much more than that—I always have, from the very beginning—"

"Please don't!" cried Katharine, anxiously, for she saw that he meant to speak at once—but it was too late.

"From the very beginning, since almost the first time I ever saw you—oh, my—my dear Miss Lauderdale—won't you let me say it at last?"

"No—no—please—"

"If you only knew how hard I've tried—not to say it before," he blurted out, as the blood rose warm in his brown cheeks.

CHAPTER VII.

KATHARINE turned her eyes from him and looked thoughtfully at the hearth-rug. A little silence followed Wingfield's last speech, as he sat gazing at her and hoping for a word of encouragement. But none came, and by slow degrees the eager expression faded from his face and left it anxious and pained.

"Miss Lauderdale —" he began, in an altered tone, and then stopped suddenly. "Miss — Katharine —" he began again, more softly, and still hesitated.

She looked up, and though her eyes were turned towards him, he fancied they did not see him. She was pale, and her lips were a little drawn together, and there was an incongruity between her attempt to smile and the weary tension of the brows. Everything in her face told that she pitied him with all her heart.

"I'm very sorry," she said, with real sympathy. "It's been a mistake from the beginning — a great mistake."

"Please don't say that!" he answered, impulsively — for he was impulsive, in spite of his solid,

well-balanced strength. "Please don't answer me yet—"

"But I must!" she protested, and the look of pity became more set.

"No, no! Please don't! Wait a little—and—and let me tell you—"

"It can do no good," she answered, with a sudden rough effort. "You've been misled—I didn't know—"

"What?" he asked, softly. "That—that I cared so much—and meant always—all along—from the very first—it's always been so, ever since I saw you that first night at the Bretts', after I came back from Europe—only it's more so, every time, till I can't keep it back any more, and I've got to speak, and tell you—"

"Mr. Wingfield—" began Katharine, thinking, womanlike, to chill him by the formal enunciation of his name with a protest in the tone, kindly though it was.

"Yes—you think so now," he answered, irrelevantly. "But I don't ask you to answer, I only ask you to listen to me—and, indeed, I don't want you to think that it's any one's fault, nor that there's any fault at all, because I know it will all come right, and you'll care for me a little, even if you don't now. I've spoken too soon, perhaps, and perhaps I've been rough or rude—or something—and I don't know how to tell you as I should—

because I've never told anybody such things — don't you believe me, Miss Katharine? But you wouldn't think any the better of me if I knew how to make beautiful speeches and phrases, and that sort of thing, would you?"

"Oh, no — no — and you've not been anything but nice — only —"

"I can't help it — you're my whole life, and I must tell you so now. Of course, lots of men worship you, and I daresay they know how to say it ever so much better — and that they're very much nicer men than I am. But — but there isn't one of them, I don't care who he is, who cares — who loves you as I do, or would do what I'd do for your sake, if I could, or if I had a chance. And even if you don't care for me at all yet, I'll love you so that you will — some day — and it's not the sort of love that's just flowers and attention and that, you know, like everybody's. It's got hold of me — hard, and it won't let go — ever! It's changed my whole life. I'm not at all as I used to be. You're in everything I do, and see, and think, and hear, as life is — and without you there wouldn't be any life in anything. Don't think I don't feel things because I'm so big, and I don't look sensitive, and all that — or because I can't put it into words that touch you. It's true, for all that, and all I ask is that you should believe me. Won't you believe me a little, Katharine?"

The great limbs of the young Achilles quivered, and his strong hands strained upon one another, and there was the clear ring of whole-hearted truth in the deep voice, in spite of the incoherence and poverty of the words.

"I believe you," answered Katharine, looking at the rug again. "It isn't that. But I won't let you think for one instant that there's the least possibility of my ever caring for you, or marrying you. It's absolutely impossible."

"Nothing's impossible!" he answered, impetuously. "Nothing except that you should never care at all when I'd give my life for your little finger, and my soul for your life — with all my heart, and be glad to give either —"

"It hurts me very much to hear you talk like this — because you've been misled and deceived — my father and mother —"

"How can they know what you think and feel?" asked Wingfield. "I only spoke to them because it seemed right and fair, being so much in earnest, and I couldn't tell but what there might be some one else — I had no right to pry into your secrets and watch you and try and find out — it wouldn't have seemed nice. So I asked your father, and then Mrs. Lauderdale — but I didn't suppose they knew absolutely — of course they couldn't answer for you — in that way. And I say it again — don't make up your mind — don't send me off — wait —

only wait! You don't know how love grows out of what seems to be nothing till it's bigger and stronger than the biggest and strongest of us — you can't feel it growing any more than you could feel that you were growing yourself when you were small; and you can't remember when it began, any more than you can remember what you thought of when you were a year old. That doesn't make it less real afterwards — love's such a little thing at the beginning, and by and by it takes in everything, so that the whole world is nothing beside it. And if you'll only not make up your mind — ”

“It's made up for me, long ago — in a way you don't dream of. It's absolutely, and wholly, and altogether impossible, and it always will be, no matter what happens. Oh, I can't say more than that, Mr. Wingfield — and it wouldn't be true if I said less!”

“But it can't be really true!” he protested, bending forward in his low chair. “Of course you think so — but how can you possibly tell? I don't mean to say that you're changeable, or capricious, or anything of that kind — but people do change, you know. Why — I hate to say it — but you couldn't say more than that if you were married and I didn't know it!”

Katharine started, though she was strong and her nerves were good. He had made the reflection very naturally, in answer to the very positive

words she had spoken. But to her it seemed as though he must know, or at least guess, the truth. She lost her balance for a moment, as she gazed earnestly into his honest black eyes.

"Mr. Wingfield — do you know what you're saying?" she asked, in a low voice.

He was afraid he had said something monstrous, and his face fell.

"I didn't mean to offend you," he stammered, awkwardly. "I'm awfully sorry if I said anything I shouldn't — "

Katharine forgot his contrition, and forgot to reassure him in the anxiety caused her by the mere suspicion that he might know the truth. She sat staring at him in silence for several seconds, wondering what he knew. It was more than he could bear. He bent still nearer to her, from the edge of his chair, and his hands moved a little towards her, beseechingly, in as near an approach to an eloquent gesture as such a man could have used.

"Please don't be angry with me!" he said.

"Oh, no!" she answered, in an odd voice, with a little start. "I was only thinking — "

He did not understand, and he moved backward into his chair suddenly, crossed one knee over the other with an impatient jerk, and looked away from her.

"What a brute I am!" he exclaimed, in a barely audible tone.

Katharine paid no attention to this self-condemnation. Her eyes rested thoughtfully on his face, and she seemed to be reflecting. She was examining her own conscience, trying to find out how far her actions could have brought about the state of things she saw. A woman who loves one man with all her heart has small pity for any other, though she may know that she ought to feel pity and to show it. But she does not therefore lose her sense of justice.

"Will you tell me one thing, Mr. Wingfield? Will you answer me one question?" she asked, at last.

He turned to her quickly again, with a look of surprise. She was out of tune with him, so to say, and her words and tone jarred strongly upon his own mood.

"Certainly," he answered, much more coldly than he had spoken yet. "I'll try and answer any question you ask me."

"Do you really and truly feel that I've encouraged you, as though I meant anything?" she asked, slowly.

It would not have been easy to put a question harder to answer honestly. Wingfield did not like it. A man hates to be put in the position of either telling a falsehood or giving offence, with no alternative but an unmannerly refusal to speak at all. Wingfield felt that, in the first place, he had

been badly used in spite of his protestations to the effect that no one was to blame. It had been unpardonable of Mr. and Mrs. Lauderdale to be so mistaken in their own daughter — he put it charitably — as to expose him to such an uncompromising and final refusal as he had received. He went no further in that direction. He did not think of himself as a very desirable son-in-law, and a very good match in fortune, because, like most people, he supposed that when the Lauderdale estate was divided, Katharine would ultimately have her share of it, a fact to which he was indifferent. He did not, therefore, accuse the Laudermores of having intentionally led him on. But they had acted irresponsibly. And now he fancied that Katharine was very angry with him for what he had said a few moments earlier, and he thought she was unjust, since he had really said nothing very terrible. So he resented her last question as soon as she had asked it, and he hesitated before replying. Katharine waited patiently a few moments.

"Do you really think I've been flirting?" she asked at last, seeing that he did not answer.

"No!" he cried, at once. "Oh, no — not that! Never. If you ask me whether you've ever looked at me, or spoken to me as though you really cared — no, you never have. Not once. But then — there are other things."

"What other things? What have I done?"

Feeling that he had admitted the main point in her favour, she grew a little hard.

"Well — you've let me come a great deal to see you, and you've let me send you — oh, well! No — I'm not going to say that sort of thing. I got the impression, somehow — that's all."

"You got the impression, from what I did, that I liked you — that I encouraged you?" she asked, anxiously.

"Yes. I got that impression. Besides, you've often shown plainly enough that you liked to dance with me — "

"That's true — I do. You dance very well. And I do like you — as I like several other people. It isn't wrong to like in that way, is it? It isn't flirting? It isn't as though I said things I didn't mean, is it?"

"No," answered Wingfield, in an injured tone. "It's not. Still — "

"Still, you think there's been something in my behaviour to make you think I might care? I'm very sorry — I'm very, very sorry," she repeated, her voice changing suddenly with an expression of profound regret. "Will you believe me when I tell you that it's been altogether unconscious? You can't think — if you care for me — that I'd be so heartless and cruel. You won't, will you?"

"No — I don't want to think it. I misunderstood — that's all. Put it all on me."

He was very young, and he was cruelly hurt. He spoke coldly, lest his words should choke him.

"No," answered Katharine, speaking almost to herself, "there are other people to blame, whose fault it is."

"Perhaps."

A silence followed. It was warm in the room. One of the windows was a little raised, and the bells of the horse-cars jingled cheerfully in the spring air. At last Katharine spoke again.

"I suppose it doesn't mean much to you when I say I'm sorry," she said. "If you knew, it would mean much more. I'm very much in earnest, and I shall never forget this afternoon, for I know I've hurt you. I think you're a little angry just now. It's natural. You have a right to be. Since you think that I've made you understand things I didn't mean, I wonder you're not much more angry — that you don't say much harder things to me. It wouldn't really be just, because I'm very unhappy, whether I'm to blame or not. But you're generous. I shall always be grateful to you. You won't bear me any more ill-will than you can help, will you?"

"Ill-will? I? No! I'm too fond of you — and besides, I've not done hoping yet. I shall always hope, as long as I live."

"No — you mustn't hope anything," answered Katharine, determined not to allow him the shadow

of any consolation. "It wouldn't be just to me. It would be like thinking that I were capricious. I'm not going to talk to you about friendship, and all that, as people do in books. I want you to try and forget me altogether — for I believe you — you really care for me. So there's no other way — when one really cares. Don't come here any more for the present — don't try to meet me at parties — don't ask me to dance with you. The world's very big, and you needn't see me unless you wish to. By and by it will be different. Perhaps you could go abroad for a little while again. I don't know what your plans are, but it would be better if you could. The season will be over — it's almost over now, and then you'll go one way and I shall go another, and there's no reason why we should meet. We mustn't. It wouldn't be fair to me, and it wouldn't be fair to you, either. You see — it's not as though you were disagreeable. If we meet at all, I couldn't help being very much the same as ever, and you know what I've made you think of that. You'll promise, won't you?"

"Not to try and see you sometimes? No, I won't promise that. I shall always hope —"

"But there is no hope. There's not the slightest possibility of any hope. If you knew about me, you'd understand it."

"Miss Lauderdale — will you think it very rude if I ask one question? I've -- I've put my whole

life into this — and you're sending me away without a word. So perhaps — I think you might — ”

“ What is it? ” asked Katharine, kindly.

“ Are you engaged to Jack Ralston? I've heard people say that you were, so often. Would you tell me? ”

Katharine was silent for a moment. She did not know exactly how far it would be true to say that she was engaged to John, seeing that she was married to him. Her marriage, she thought, might be looked upon as a formal betrothal, and there would have been little harm in taking that view of it, under such circumstances. But she had inherited from her father something of his formal respect for the mere letter of truth, and she did not like to say anything which did not conform to it.

“ We're not exactly engaged, ” she answered, after a short pause. “ But we care for each other very much. ”

Wingfield's brow cleared a little. He had one of those dispositions which hope in spite of apparent certainty against them.

“ Then I'll go away for awhile, ” he said, with sudden resolution and considerable generosity, from his point of view. “ If you don't marry him, I'll come back, that's all. I'm glad you told me. Thank you. ”

It requires considerable self-control to act as Archibald Wingfield did on that occasion. His

voice did not tremble, and he did not turn pale, because it was not in his nature to experience that sort of physical weakness when he was making an effort. But what he did was not easy. Even Katharine could see that. He sat still a few moments after he had spoken, glanced at her once, as though to make sure that there was to be no appeal, and then rose suddenly from his seat, and stood towering above her.

"Good-bye," he said, holding out his hand, and stooping to bring it within her reach. Now that the effort had been made, his voice trembled a little.

"Good-bye," answered Katharine, taking his hand, and lifting her head almost without raising her eyes.

There was something almost like timidity in her tone. She felt how he had been wronged by her father and mother, and in her trouble she was willing to believe that she was really a little to blame herself. She realized, too, that he was acting very bravely and honestly, and that he was really suffering. It was not a grand, dramatic agony, and eloquence was the least of his gifts, but he was strong, young, and in earnest, and had been made to undergo pain for her sake. She was ashamed of having been the cause of it.

No other words suggested themselves to her, but he waited one moment, as though expecting

that she would speak again. Then he silently dropped her hand, and bowing his head a little, went quietly to the door without looking back. She did not follow him with her eyes, but she listened for the sound of the latch, and it did not come quite so soon as she expected. He had turned to look at her once more, his hand on the door.

"God bless you — Katharine," he said, in a low voice.

She looked round at him quickly, and the faint, sorrowful smile came back to her face. Her lips moved, but no words came. He gazed at her one moment, and then took his young grief out into the spring air and the evening sunshine.

When Katharine was alone, she sighed and gazed at the hearth-rug, bending forward in a thoughtful attitude, her chin supported in her hand.

"How hard it is!" she exclaimed to herself.

It seemed to her that the difficulties of her life grew with every passing day. She had, indeed, cut the knot of one of them within the last half hour, and so far as Archibald Wingfield was concerned, the hard thing had been done, and he knew the worst. But she, on her part, had much to bear yet. She had seen to-day, for the first time, how her father and mother longed to have her married. Even now, she found it difficult to suspect

either of them of intentional cruelty, or of attempting to use anything more than persuasion in pushing her into the match. With her faculty for seeing both sides of a question at once, she was just. It was natural, perhaps, that they should wish her to marry such a man. She had never seen any one like him — such a magnificent specimen of youthful manhood. Even her father could not compare with him. And he had much besides his looks to recommend him, much besides his fortune and his position and his popularity. He was brave and honest, and able to love truly, as it seemed.

He would recover, of course, she said to herself. He was sought after, flattered, and pursued for many reasons. He could find plenty of young girls only too delighted to marry him, and he would certainly marry one of them before long. His life was not blighted, and she had not broken his heart, if hearts ever break at all. She remembered what she had once borne, in the belief that John Ralston was disgraced for life on that memorable occasion when all New York had learned that he had been brought home, apparently drunk, after a midnight encounter with a pugilist, who had found occasion to quarrel with him in a horse-car. The belief had lasted a whole night and a whole day, and she did not think that young Wingfield could be suffering anything like that. Moreover, her love for Ralston

made her ruthless and almost hard about every other man. Nevertheless, she was sincerely sorry for the man who had just left her — the more so, perhaps, because she had little or nothing with which to reproach herself.

Katharine was not left to her own reflections very long. By a process akin to telepathy, Mrs. Lauderdale was soon aware that Archibald Wingfield had left the house. In the half hour during which his visit had lasted, she had not touched her miniature, though she had looked at it, and turned it to and from the light many times. She was very nervous, and she wished that when he went away he might forthwith take himself off to China, at the very least. She did not wish to meet him that evening, nor the next, to be called to account by him for having exceeded her powers in the impression she had conveyed of Katharine's readiness to marry him. Yet she remembered that she had acted very much in the same way when Charlotte had married Benjamin Slayback. It was true that Slayback was a much older man, and well able to take care of himself, and that Charlotte had not at the time been showing any especial preference for any of her adorers. She had, in fact, just then dismissed one for the grievous offence of having turned out an unutterable bore after three weeks of almost unbroken conversation, during which she had exhausted his not fertile intellect,

as furnace heat dries a sponge. Charlotte's heart had been comparatively free, therefore, and she had been indulging in dreams of power and personal influence. But Mrs. Lauderdale and her husband had on that occasion used to Mr. Slayback almost the identical words which she had lately repeated to Wingfield; Slayback had come, had proposed, — in what manner Charlotte had never revealed, — and had been immediately accepted. Surely, there was nothing wrong in assuming that Katharine might possibly behave in the same way, seeing how very much more desirable a suitor Wingfield was than Slayback. Thus argued Mrs. Lauderdale, as she tried to trip up her conscience and step over it. But she was too good by nature to be successful in such a fraud upon goodness, and in the midst of her involuntary self-reproaches, her heart was beating with anxiety to know the result of the interview.

It meant a great deal to her, for she was sure that if Katharine could be removed from the household, peace must descend upon her own soul once more, and she longed for peace. Somehow, she felt that if she could only enjoy that supremacy of her wonderful beauty for one month more — for one last month, before she grew old — she could meet Katharine again, and forgive her all her youth and freshness, and forgive herself for having envied them. As her life was now, she

could not, try how she would. The pain was upon her hourly, and she could not but resent it, and almost hate the cause of it.

Though she constantly looked at her miniature, and moved the brushes and little saucers on the table, her hearing was preternaturally sharpened, as it was in reality the barely audible sound of the distant front door which told her that Wingfield was gone. Instinctively she looked towards the door of her own room, hesitated, then rose suddenly, and went out with a quick, nervous step, and a determined look in her face. Without stopping to consider what she should say, she descended to the library.

Katharine looked up with an expression of annoyance as her mother entered.

"He's gone, then?" said Mrs. Lauderdale, interrogatively.

"Yes. He's just gone," answered Katharine, in a voice that did not promise confidence.

"What did you tell him, dear?"

Mrs. Lauderdale sat down beside her daughter. The smile she put on was as unnatural as the endearing tone, and Katharine observed it. She suffered in the artificiality which had developed in her mother of late, so unlike the dignified personality which she had been used to love.

"Really, mother, I can't repeat the conversation. I couldn't if I wished to. What difference does it

make what I said, since he's gone? I told you what I should say. Well — I've said it."

"You've sent him away for good — just like that?"

"I've told him the plain truth, and he's gone. He won't come back — unless he wants to see you," she added, rather bitterly. "I don't think he will, though. You've not exactly helped him to be happy."

"Katharine!" There was an injured protest in the tone.

"I don't see why you should be surprised," answered the young girl. "Of course he might take it into his head to be angry with you for what you've done. It wasn't very nice. I'm not sure that, in his place, I should ever wish to see you again."

"My child, what an exaggeration! You talk as though I had deliberately sought him out and asked him to the house — almost asked him to marry you."

"It comes to that," observed Katharine, coldly.

"Really, Katharine, you're — beyond words!" Mrs. Lauderdale drew back a little, in displeasure, and looked at her severely.

"I could forgive you," continued the young girl, "if you hadn't known that I love Jack and never shall marry any one else. You know it and you've always known it. That makes it much

worse. You've made that poor man suffer without the slightest reason. You could just as well have told him that you knew I cared for some one else, and you could have been as nice to him as you pleased. You've hurt him, and you've driven me to hurt him, by no fault of mine, just to undo the mischief you've done. Of course, it's papa who's really done it all, but you needn't have let him twist you round his little finger like a wisp of straw."

"Oh, Katharine! Anything more unjust!"

"I'm not unjust, mother. But I'm too old to think everything you do is perfect, merely because it's you. When I see a man like Archie Wingfield sitting there and straining his hands to keep himself quiet, and choking with the sound of his own words, I know he's suffering — and when I know that he's suffering uselessly, and that it's all your fault and papa's, I judge you — that's all. I'm a grown woman. I have a right to judge."

The door opened and Alexander Junior appeared upon the threshold, just returned from his office.

"I heard your voice, so I came in," he said, with an electric smile which was meant to be conciliatory. "Oh!" he exclaimed, in altered tones, as he saw the faces of the two women, "has anything happened?"

For a moment there was silence. Mrs. Lauderdale looked at the empty fireplace, avoiding the

eyes of both her husband and her daughter. But Katharine leaned back in her seat and faced her father. Her voice was almost as cold and steely as his could be when she answered him at last.

"Mr. Wingfield has just asked me to marry him," she said. "And I have refused him—unconditionally."

"You've done an exceedingly foolish thing, then," answered Alexander Junior. "And you'll be very sorry for it before long."

He came nearer and stood by the fireplace, laying one authoritative hand upon the mantelpiece, and shaking the forefinger of the other in a warning manner.

"I'm the best judge of that," answered Katharine, undaunted and unimpressed by his parental tone.

"You're not," answered Mr. Lauderdale. "You've acquired a habit of contradicting me lately. It seems to be a part of your plan for being as utterly undutiful and disobedient as you can. I warn you that I won't submit to it any longer."

"It's of no use to threaten me, papa," answered Katharine, controlling herself as well as she could. "And it doesn't do any good to call me undutiful and disobedient so often. It doesn't make it true."

"Katharine!" cried her mother, in a tone of distress which was not artificial.

"I know what I'm saying, mother — "

"Then you should be sincerely ashamed of yourself, Katharine," said Alexander Junior. "As sincerely as I'm ashamed that a daughter of mine should use such language."

Katharine rose slowly from her chair and stood up before him, while her mother remained seated.

"Neither of you have any right to say that you're ashamed of anything I've done," she said. "As for my language, it's mild enough — for what you've done. I've been ashamed of you both to-day — here, in this room, half an hour ago. You've told an honest man who's foolishly in love with me that I cared for him, and would have him if he would ask me, when you know that I will never marry any one but Jack Ralston. It seems to me that I've had good reason to be ashamed of you. It was hard to look him in the face, and tell him that my father and mother had misled and deceived him — to make him own that he had it all from you, and that I'd not given him the shadow of a reason for thinking that I cared for him — that he had it all from you. Oh, it was so plain! Not that you can deny it — and you tell me that you're ashamed of me! If I didn't love Jack, do you know what I'd have done? I'd have married Archie Wingfield to save you your respect for yourself, and a little of his for you!"

"I refuse to listen any longer to such insane

nonsense," said Alexander Junior, whose slow wrath was rising by degrees.

"You shall listen to me," answered Katharine. "I'm fighting with you for my life and happiness, and you've got to face me like an honest man — though you are my father!"

CHAPTER VIII.

"KATHARINE! This is too much!" cried Alexander Junior, his anger rising in his eyes.

The man's heavy hand fell emphatically upon the mantelpiece, making the old-fashioned gilt clock and the Chinese vases tremble and rattle. Mrs. Lauderdale was not a nervous woman, but she rose from her seat and stood beside her husband, not exactly as though she meant to take his side, and yet not exactly as a peace-maker. She felt herself accused as much as he did by the pale, strong girl who stood before them, one hand hanging by her side, the other pulling nervously at the little silver pin at her collar as though she felt that it was choking her. Of the three, at that moment, Mrs. Lauderdale was by far the most self-possessed.

"It's true," answered Katharine. "Every word of it's true!"

As she spoke she caught her breath, and was obliged to stop, white with anger.

"Katharine — my child! Don't!" cried Mrs. Lauderdale, fearing she was going to faint.

"I think you'd better go, my dear," said Alex-

ander to his wife. "She's beside herself. I'll bring her to her senses."

The passionate blood rose in the girl's face and the words came again.

"No, mother—stay here!" she said. "You have no right to go away. Yes—I say that for months you've been doing your best, both of you, to destroy my happiness—and you'll destroy my life with it, if I stay with you longer. You've tried to separate me from the man I love, and you've been trying every day and every hour to make me marry another man—pushing him on, encouraging him, telling him that I would accept him—for all I know, telling him that I loved him. I've not forgotten the things you've done—I've not forgotten the day when you, mother, you who had stood by us so long, suddenly turned without reason and told Jack to go away. Here, in this very room, last winter—and you, papa—I've only to make you remember how you took that letter when it was brought, and kept it all day, and repeated all the lies that people told about Jack—and mother read me the things in the papers—and you made me believe that he had written to me when he was drunk. It was all a lie, a miserable, infamous lie! And you liked it, and repeated it, and turned it over and embroidered it and beautified it—to make it hurt me more. It did hurt me—it almost killed me—but for Jack's sake, I wish to God it had!"

"Katharine, this is blasphemy!" exclaimed her father, his cold eyes glittering with rage—but he was not fluent, he could find no words to dam the stream of hers.

"Blasphemy!" she cried, indignantly. "Is it blasphemy to pray—unless your God is my Devil?"

Beside himself with passion, her father made a step forward, and with a quick movement covered her mouth with one hand and grasped her arm with the other. But he miscalculated her quickness as against his strength. With a turn of the hand and wrist she was free and sprang backwards a step.

"It's like you to lay your hands on a woman, after trying to sell her!" she cried, her lips turning a dull grey, her eyes colder and brighter than his own.

Being roused, they were terribly well matched. Mrs. Lauderdale threw herself between them. To do her justice, she faced her husband, with one hand stretched out to warn him back.

"No, no, mother! don't come between us. I'm not afraid—I only got my mouth free to tell him that he's a coward to lay his hands on me. But that was his only answer, because the things I say are true—every one of them, and more, too. That's your one idea—both of you—to marry me off and get me out of the house, because you can't

look me in the face after the things you've done — after coming between me and Jack, as you've tried to do, and would have done, if we'd loved each other less — after trying to force me upon the first man who took a fancy to my face — after tormenting me to betray uncle Robert's confidence — and it's all been for money, and for nothing else. Money, money, money!"

"My child, you're mad!" cried Mrs. Lauderdale. "What has money to do with it? What are you talking about? Do you know that you're making the most insane accusations?"

"Let her talk," said Alexander, in a low, sullen voice. "She doesn't know what she's saying."

Ashamed of his outbreak, perhaps, or in sheer helplessness against Katharine's desperate speech, he had fallen back again and stood leaning against the mantelpiece, his arms folded over his broad chest, his hands twitching at his sleeve, his pale mouth set like a steel trap, a dull, dangerous light in his eyes.

"You're mistaken," continued Katharine. "It's all for money. Money's at the root of every action of your life. You didn't want me to marry Jack because he's poor, and because uncle Robert might not leave him anything. Money! You thought at first you could make me take Hamilton Bright, because he's cared for me so long — and because he's beginning to be rich and is a partner in

Bemans'—money, again! Archie Wingfield—how many millions will he have? Money—of course. Uncle Robert's will—what shall you get by it? Money—and you'd tear the figures out of my head with red hot pincers if you could—just to know how much you'll have when the poor man's dead. Ever since we were children, Charlotte and I, you've preached economy and saving and poverty—you've let my mother—your wife—and you're the nephew of the great Robert Lauderdale—you've let her work her hands and her eyes till they ached to make a little money herself—not for herself only, but for us. No—don't smile contemptuously like that. She's done it all my life, and she's doing it still. Your children could scarcely have been decently dressed, if she hadn't earned a few hundred dollars for them. There's hardly a thing I have on that she's not paid for out of her earnings. We couldn't have gone to our first ball, Charlotte or I, but for her. And still, day after day, you say you're poor. Do you think I don't see all the little meannesses? Do you think I can't smell the vile cigars you make grandpapa smoke, to save those few cents? Is there a house among all our friends, poor as some of them are, where there isn't a fire in the library, at least in the evening, even when there's nobody asked to dinner? Economy, saving, meanness of all sorts—even the poor housemaid who

broke her arm on the kitchen stairs! You sent to the hospital the day before she was to leave, half-cured and helpless, and made her sign the declaration that she made no further claim upon you. She came here when you were down town. Mother gave her five dollars — out of her earnings — but I heard her story. Oh, they're endless, your ways of saving that filthy, miserable money of yours!"

"Are you really mad, Katharine?" asked her father, in a dull, monotonous voice.

"Child! You know we're comparatively poor," said Mrs. Lauderdale. "Come — dear child —"

She laid her hand on the girl's arm as though she would lead her away and end the violent scene, but Katharine stood firm.

"Poor!" she cried, indignantly. "Comparatively poor! Yes — compared with uncle Robert or Mr. Beman, perhaps. But papa is not poor, though he has told you so for years, though he lets you work for money — you! Though he borrows five dollars of you — I've seen it again and again — and never returns it — borrows the poor little sums you earn by hard work! Oh, it's not to be believed! Borrows without ever meaning to give it back — like an honest man — oh, he wouldn't dare to do that with his dearest friend. But you! You can't help yourself —"

"My dear, he keeps an account —"

"I know, I know! He pretends that he keeps

the money for you and allows you interest! I've heard him say so. Interest on five dollars. And have you ever had it? Sordid — mean — there's no word! And he keeps telling you that he's poor, and that we must pinch and scrape or we shall go beyond our income — when he has over a million of dollars put away — ”

“Be silent!” cried Alexander Junior, with sudden vehemence, his cheeks as grey as ashes.

“I won't be silent! I'll say every word I have to say. Look me in the face. Deny, if you dare, before God, that what I say is true — that you have that money put away somewhere. Is it true, or not, as you hope to be saved?”

Mrs. Lauderdale came between them again, laying her hands on Katharine's arm and trying to make her leave the room.

“Take care, take care!” she cried, anxiously, and hardly knowing what she said. “Alexander — Katharine! Don't — oh, please don't quarrel like this — my child, my child! You're beside yourself!”

“I'm not — it's true as life and death!” answered the girl, resisting the pressure. “Ask him if it's not! Make him swear that it's not true — make him say, before heaven, that he has less than a million, while he's selling his daughters and forcing his wife to work. Wait — don't speak — listen to what he says! If he can't say it, his

whole life has been a lie, and he knows it — wait — hush!"

Katharine held her mother fast by the hands, and seemed to hold her own breath, her angry eyes fixed on her father's face. Mrs. Lauderdale turned her head instinctively, and looked at him. He met their glances for a few seconds, and his dry, pale lips parted as though he were about to speak, but no sound came. In the waning light his eyes had a glassy look. It only lasted a moment, and then his mouth was twisted with an expression meant for a smile.

"Take her away — she's mad," he said, and his voice seemed to be suddenly weak.

Katharine laughed aloud, bitterly and cruelly, in her triumph.

"If I were mad, as you say I am," she said, a moment later, "that would not make it impossible for you to tell the truth. Yes, mother — I'm going now. I've said it all — and you know it's true."

She dropped her mother's hands, turned contemptuously away, and left the room. Neither her father nor her mother moved as she went, though they followed her with their eyes until the door closed behind her with a soft click.

Alexander Lauderdale was torn by the strongest emotions of which he was capable — anger and avarice. But avarice was the stronger. So long as

Katharine had accused him of unkindness, of dishonesty in his treatment of Wingfield, of meanness in his household, his wrath, though powerless, had kept the upper hand. But at the sudden and unexpected accusation of possessing a fortune in secret, he had been cowed. It was characteristic of him that even in that moment he would not swear falsely, and he saw the folly of denying the statement if he could not support his denial with something like an oath. When passions have reached such a crisis, they are not satisfied with less than they demand. On the whole, it had been wiser to say nothing. He could admit afterwards that he had saved something — he would assure his wife that Katharine's statement had been exaggerated — little by little, calm would be restored. And there would not necessarily be any increase of expenditure. At that crucial moment two thoughts had been uppermost in his mind. The miser's dismay at the discovery of his wealth, and the miser's visions of ruinous expense in the immediate future. In a flash, he had seen himself forced to spend fifty or sixty thousand a year, instead of ten or twelve, and all possible forms of reckless extravagance had appeared to him in a horror of kaleidoscopic confusion. It was torture to think of it — to realize that his secret was out.

The strong man stood, half-stunned, leaning against the mantelpiece, pulling nervously at the

bit of embroidered velvet which covered it, his face drawn in an expression of suffering and fear. He dreaded the question which he knew that his wife would ask him, but he had not even the power to speak at that moment, in order to ward it off.

Mrs. Lauderdale hesitated a moment, wondering whether it might not be better to follow Katharine to her room and try to calm her and make her more reasonable. Never, in all the girl's life, had her mother seen her so passionately angry nor heard her use the tone of defying strength which had rung in her voice as she accused her father. Mrs. Lauderdale herself was frightened, and almost feared for Katharine's reason. But there had, nevertheless, been so much assurance of truth in what she had said, that her mother was half convinced. Before she left the room to follow her daughter, she turned to her husband, and the inevitable question came. It could not be otherwise. The girl's accusation had vividly brought before Mrs. Lauderdale the labour she had expended in all the past years, and of which the result had been to give her children what it was their father's duty to give them if he had anything to give. Many a time, too, she herself had chafed under the necessity of lending him small sums for an emergency, accepting a promise of payment which was never fulfilled, and forced to be satisfied with the assurance that he kept an account of

what he owed her. He seemed never to have money about him. He always said that he was afraid of losing it — he, the most careful of men! The cumulative force of those many small meannesses extending over a quarter of a century of married life was tremendous when they were brought up in a body and made to face the positive statement that he was in reality a rich man. A good wife she had been to Alexander Junior in every sense of the word, but of that early trusting love which hides more sins than the multitude of them which charity can cover, there was not left even the warmth where the spark had glowed. There was no ‘*a priori*’ judgment of one heart against all possible offence and sordid meanness in the other. Katharine’s blow had been heavy and direct, and had gone straight to its mark. Her mother loved her — in spite of her terrible envy of her. It would need the man’s solemn oath to outweigh the girl’s plain statement. The inevitable question came, as Alexander knew that it must. He moved nervously as she began to speak.

“Alexander, dear,” she said, speaking gently from force of habit, “it would be very easy for you to deny this.”

He had thought of what he should say.

“My dear, I think that after spending half a lifetime together, during which you’ve had occasion to find out that I’m truthful, it’s scarcely

necessary to pay any attention to an angry child's ravings."

But Mrs. Lauderdale was not satisfied with this poor excuse. Katharine had roused her own resentment, and she remembered many things now, which Katharine herself did not know — little things — the dry sticks that will make a smouldering fire blaze.

"It's precisely because you're so truthful that it seems strange when you refuse to answer a simple question, Alexander," observed Mrs. Lauderdale, quietly enough.

She did not wish to take up Katharine's quarrel, nor to give the present conversation the air of an argument. She therefore did not stay beside him, as though they were discussing any point, but moved about the room, pretending to arrange small objects and books and generally to set the room in order, which was a work of supererogation, to keep herself in countenance while she renewed the attack.

"You admit that I'm truthful," said Alexander, coldly. "I'm glad you do. That settles the question at once. If I've been a rich man all these years, then I've not been telling the truth, nor acting it, either. It's all too absurd for discussion. I confess that at first I was angry. The girl spoke to me in the most outrageous manner. I don't remember that any one has ever said anything of

the kind to me in my life. It's wrong to be angry, and I repent of it, but I think I may be pardoned — considering what she said. It's been a disgraceful scene. I'm sincerely thankful that none of the servants were present."

"Oh — it was natural that you should lose your temper, of course!"

"Human, at all events," said Alexander, with dignity; "I don't think I've ever made any pretence of possessing superior virtues. A man may justifiably lose his temper sometimes. 'Be angry and sin not.' I did not intend to be violent."

"No — of course not! Still —"

"Yes. I took her by the arm and deliberately laid my hand upon her mouth. That was not violence. Few men of sincere convictions would have done less, considering the blasphemous words she was uttering. It's the duty of parents to hinder their children from committing such sins, when they can. In the case of a man, I should have used my strength to enforce silence. As it was, I merely covered her mouth with my hand. I recollect that you came between us, as though you thought I meant to be violent. Nothing could have been further from my thoughts, I assure you."

"I trust so," said Mrs. Lauderdale, taking a package of envelopes out of the little stationery rack on the writing-table, turning it round and putting it back again.

"With regard to Archibald Wingfield," continued Alexander, getting further and further from the question of the money, "you know as well as I do, that we have treated him precisely as we treated Slayback, when he wished to marry Charlotte. As for me, I told him that I saw no reason why Katharine might not — 'might not ultimately,' mind you — accept an offer which was so agreeable to me personally. I fail to see anything which can be criticised in that answer. I should by no means like to say positively, even now, that Katharine 'might not ultimately' accept him. That would amount to denying the existence of an evident possibility, which is absurd. She may, so far as that goes. I don't say she will. I say, she may. Young women frequently change their minds, and sometimes for the better. Let us hope for the best. Of course I don't know every word of what you said to him, though you did your best on each occasion to tell me all about it. I gathered that you gave him very much the same sort of negative encouragement that I did. Practically, we told him to try his luck."

Mrs. Lauderdale had rarely heard her husband speak so long consecutively. He was not fluent, as a rule, and in the recent quarrel with Katharine he had been almost speechless. But now he was talking for his life, as it were. If he lost the position of domination which he had held so long

with his wife, his existence must be shaken to its foundation. He barely gave her a chance to introduce a word.

"I'm not so positively sure, myself," she said. "Of course I didn't mean to convey any wrong impression to young Wingfield, but—"

"But you may perhaps have pardonably exceeded your powers," interrupted Alexander, anxious that she should not commit herself. "Very pardonable, my dear, very pardonable. Such things happen constantly, even in business. Of course the party who goes beyond his instructions bears the responsibility in case anything goes wrong. Just so in the present case. If there is any responsibility, which may be doubted, it's yours and not mine, for I'm positively certain of the words I spoke — of the very words. I said 'might not ultimately accept' — I recollect very distinctly, and you know how accurate my memory is."

"Yes — I know," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, in a tone which might have been thought to give the words a doubtful meaning.

"Of course you do, my dear. If Wingfield got a wrong impression, — 'if he did,' mind you, — he must have got it from you. I think you might perhaps explain that to Katharine — when she's a little calmer. I can't allow her to think that her father, whom she's bound to respect, should have done such a thing. A man's actions carry much

more weight than a woman's. I couldn't allow her to think that I'd taken her feelings for granted. There's no immediate hurry, Emma, but I should be glad if you would explain it to her. It will help to restore peace. As for her reasons for rejecting Wingfield," he continued, without pausing for his wife's answer, "I regret them very much. It's a miserable thing to see such a girl wasting her chances of happiness on such a reprobate as Jack Ralston, and I do her the honour to say that such an affection can't possibly be lasting. As for her marrying him, of course that's altogether outside the question. I'm sure she clings to the attachment far more out of a desire to oppose my wishes in everything, than because she really cares for that vagabond. I've not the slightest fear that she'll ever marry him. I'm sure you don't think so, either."

"Unless she runs away with him," suggested Mrs. Lauderdale.

She was annoyed by the skill with which he, who was ordinarily less keen, had passed from the main subject in question to a side issue. She did not know how a great passion like avarice can sharpen wits under danger of discovery.

"Oh, well!" exclaimed Alexander, with much dignity. "If she runs away with the fellow, that puts her altogether beyond the pale of our love, and we shall have done with her. We won't dis-

cuss that. 'The objection to this pretence of loving Ralston — for I'm convinced that it's nothing else — is that it keeps her from marrying a man worthy of her, like Archibald Wingfield. Of course there are people far richer than the Wingfields — uncle Robert, for instance, besides the others who are so much richer even than he, and count their millions by the hundred; but taking him all in all, there's not a better match in society — for looks, and education, and position, and health, too, which I regard as a very important consideration. You must agree with me, my dear — Wingfield would have made an excellent husband."

"Of course I agree with you, Alexander. What an unnecessary question!"

"My dear, when the very foundations of one's life are being torn up and thrown out of the window by a silly girl, it becomes necessary to ask all the simplest questions over again."

This extraordinary simile produced no very convincing effect on Mrs. Lauderdale, who had listened to phrase after phrase of his long tirades with exemplary outward resignation, for the sake of allowing peace to be restored by the overflow of self-conscious virtue, but with little inward patience.

"I think the best thing to do is to let the whole matter drop, and hope that Katharine will change her mind," she said, sensibly.

"Yes. Let's hope that, at all events. Emma, we can't have any more scenes like this. If Katharine breaks out in this way again, I shall refuse to see her. You may, if you please. But I will not. When I'm at home she shall stay in her room."

"But that's impossible!" exclaimed Mrs. Lauderdale, in astonishment. "You wouldn't treat a child like that!"

"I would," answered Alexander, and his lips snapped on the words. "And I will, if there's any repetition of such conduct. That's a matter for me to judge, Emma, and I don't wish you to interfere. She has accused her own father of being a liar, of selling her, of being a miser, and of stealing his wife's money. You can't deny that, and I presume you've no intention of supporting the accusations. Yes, even as it is, I prefer that Katharine should not appear this evening. When she's begged my pardon for what she's done, I'll consent to see her. Not before. Pray tell her that this is my decision, Emma."

"But, Alexander, I never heard of such a thing! Of course she lost her temper and was awfully rude to you, and I'm very much displeased with her. But really — you can't treat a grown woman like a baby. It's too absurd."

"It's not absurd, my dear. You must excuse me if I adopt Katharine's method of contradiction.

The only way to treat her is to treat her as a child. If we consider her to be a grown woman, we must either resent what she's done — as though she were any other woman — or else take it for granted that she is temporarily insane, and drive her out to Bloomingdale Asylum to-morrow morning to be cured. But so long as we regard the whole thing as childish, it's sufficient to tell her that she's not to come to table until she's begged my pardon. Don't you see?"

Mrs. Lauderdale was aware that he was talking nonsense, approximately speaking, and she saw that he meant to do a very unwise thing. But as he put it, the only good argument against his course would have been to prove that Katharine was right and that he was wrong, which, with some allowance for undue and angry exaggeration, would be equivalent to proving him a miser and anything but a straightforward person. Mrs. Lauderdale's trouble was considerable at that moment.

"You may be right in theory," she said, almost despairingly, "but in practice I think you're quite wrong. One doesn't do that sort of thing nowadays. If we've all got to fight like mad people, let's keep it to ourselves —"

"That's precisely what I'm thinking of," interrupted Alexander, whose resolution was growing stronger every moment.

"Yes — but, my dear! The servants — and your father, too! I don't think he's very discreet —"

"Yes, exactly, my dear Emma. That's just how I look at it. I think I know Katharine quite as well as you do, and I'm sure that if she has an opportunity of attacking me, she will, before the servants and before my father. I should much rather let people know that I had told Katharine to stay in her room until she could treat me with proper respect, than have such a conversation as has just taken place here repeated all over New York. I'm sure you see that, don't you?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, suddenly comprehending his point of view. "But it seems to me that if there's to be such an open break, it would be better to let Katharine go down to Washington for a few days and stay with Charlotte."

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Alexander. "You know what Charlotte is, and what trouble we have had with her. The two girls would make common cause. Not at all. Not at all, Emma. I shall be glad if you will go at once and tell Katharine what I've said — that I don't wish to see her until she has made amends for her outrageous conduct."

"But, Alexander," protested Mrs. Lauderdale, "it will be so inconvenient — sending her dinner upstairs!"

"I daresay it won't be for long. She'll understand in a day or two, I've no doubt."

"I can't do it," said Mrs. Lauderdale, trying to make a stand. "It's too utterly — extraordinary —"

"My dear, I'm the master in this house," answered Alexander, coldly. "I wish it to be so. But if you'd rather not speak to her, I'll go myself. She irritates me, but I'm glad to say she doesn't intimidate me. As for such domestic difficulties as serving Katharine in her own room, they can be got over. Let your maid take the child her dinner."

"Well—if you insist, I'll go," said Mrs. Lauderdale, weakly yielding. "I couldn't let you go — you'd quarrel again."

"I don't insist upon your going, my dear—I have no right to. But I insist upon the thing being done."

Mrs. Lauderdale went towards the door. She paused before she went out. "I think you're going too far, Alexander," she said. "I think you're tyrannical."

"I think not," he answered, coolly. "I should refuse to sit down to table with a man who had used such language to me. I don't see why I should submit to it from Katharine."

"Well—"

Mrs. Lauderdale closed the door behind her, and slowly went upstairs, feeling as though she had been driven from the field after a crushing defeat.

Yet she had made very little resistance: With her, the man's cold, arrogant personality was dominant. She had always submitted to it because there seemed to be no other course. She was conscious of wishing that during the last five minutes she might have possessed her daughter's character and fighting qualities, especially when her husband had quietly thrust all the blame about the treatment of Wingfield upon herself, without considering for a moment that his own words might have been misinterpreted.

She did not altogether sympathize with him against Katharine. For many years she had felt the galling of his miserable meanness, and had many times suspected that he was by no means as poor as he chose to declare himself to be.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. LAUDERDALE went slowly upstairs, thinking over what she should say, as she climbed from one story to another. At the door she knocked softly, and Katharine's voice bade her enter.

Katharine was standing at the window, looking out, and did not turn round as her mother entered. The evening light was on the houses opposite, and the glow was gently sinking into the darker street. Katharine watched the horse-cars go by, and listened mechanically to the jingle of the bells, hardly conscious of either.

"What is it?" she asked, as she heard the door close.

Her voice had that peculiar reedy sound which comes of speaking through the closed teeth by the lips only. It seems to mean that the speaker is on the defensive and not to be trifled with.

"Your father — Katharine — he's so angry! He wanted me to speak to you."

"Oh — it's you, mother?" The girl's tone changed a very little, and she turned and came forward. "Well — I'm sorry," she said, after a short pause. "It can't be helped, I suppose."

Mrs. Lauderdale sat down in the one small arm-chair, by the toilet-table, and clasped her hands over her knee, leaning back, and looking up rather wistfully at Katharine.

"I think — in a way — it can be helped," said Mrs. Lauderdale, in a conciliatory manner. "If you would go downstairs now, and just say quietly that you're sorry, you know. Just as you said it now. I'm sure he'd be willing to accept that as an apology."

"Apology?" Katharine laughed bitterly. "I — make an apology to him? No, mother — I won't."

"You ought to — really," objected Mrs. Lauderdale, earnestly. "Why, my dear child! Have you any idea of what you've been saying downstairs? Some of the things you said were dreadful."

"They were all true, and he knows it," answered Katharine, stubbornly.

She leaned against the chest of drawers, and looked down into her mother's upturned face.

"Oh, no! they weren't all true, dear," protested the latter. "You exaggerated very much. It's quite possible that your father may have saved something in all these years — he's so careful! But as for having a million, as you said — "

"But, dear mother — there isn't a doubt of it! I didn't promise uncle Robert that I wouldn't tell that — "

"What? Did uncle Robert tell you?"

"Yes! Of course! Did you suppose I was inventing?"

"Well — not exactly. But I thought you might have heard some gossip — or something Jack Ralston said —"

"Not at all. Uncle Robert told me that he knew it to be a positive fact — a million, at least, he said. And he's quite as truthful as papa —"

"More so," said Mrs. Lauderdale, absently; "I mean," she added, very quickly, with a frightened look, for she had not realized what she was saying — "I mean — quite as truthful. They're both perfectly truthful —"

"Yes," answered Katharine in a doubtful tone, and smiling in spite of herself. "Not but that, if it came to believing, you know, I'd believe uncle Robert sooner than papa —"

"Hush, child — don't!"

Katharine said nothing, but still leaned back, resting both elbows on the high chest of drawers on each side behind her, and looking down thoughtfully at the points of her shoes. Mrs. Lauderdale was silent, too, for several seconds.

"Well?" Katharine uttered the convenient word interrogatively, without looking up.

"Well — yes," responded Mrs. Lauderdale. "I was going to say that —" She hesitated. "My dear," she continued, at last, "you'll have to say something to your father, after all this."

"Something like what I've said already?" asked Katharine, raising her black eyebrows and glancing at her mother.

"No, no! I'm serious, my dear."

"So am I — very. You began to talk of an apology. It's quite useless, mother — I can't and I won't apologize."

"But, Katharine, darling — he says he won't see you unless you do — he's dreadfully angry still!"

"Oh — he won't see me? What does that mean? That I'm to stay in my room?" She laughed a little.

"He's in earnest about it," said Mrs. Lauderdale. "That's what he said — he — I don't like to say it — but I must, I suppose. That's just it. He means you to stay in your room whenever he's in the house."

"How childish!" exclaimed Katharine, scornfully. "What do I care? I don't want to see him particularly. But, just for curiosity — if he happens to meet me on the stairs, for instance, what will he do? Throw things at me? Box my ears? He's quite capable of it — as you saw just now —"

"Please don't talk like that, dear," said Mrs. Lauderdale. "He was terribly angry — and you were saying the most dreadful things — he only meant to stop you from speaking."

"He hurt my mouth, and he hurt my arm — there'll be black and blue marks here to-morrow,

I'm sure, by the way it feels." She laid her left hand on her right forearm at the point where her father had seized it. "That's rather like violence, you know, mother."

Katharine turned perceptibly paler as she spoke of it. Mrs. Lauderdale was pained at the recollection, and looked away from her, clasping her hands a little more tightly over her knee.

"Did he ever touch you in that way, mother?" asked the young girl, slowly.

"Me?" cried Mrs. Lauderdale. "Oh — child! How can you think of such a thing! No, indeed! Fancy!"

"Well — I'm just as sensitive as you are," answered Katharine. "Put yourself in my place."

The unexpected answer silenced the elder woman.

"I think it's his place to apologize to me — and very humbly," added Katharine. "It was a cowardly piece of violence to a woman. I'm willing to believe — for the honour of the family, and men generally — that he didn't mean to strike, exactly. But it felt very much like it, and I told him so. I'll tell him so again, if he mentions the thing."

Mrs. Lauderdale was in great difficulties. Her husband and her daughter were both stronger than she, they had no intention of making up their quarrel, and yet, by her position, she was forced to act as intermediary. It was not easy. Her

husband dominated her by his strong personality. Katharine had the better of her in argument. She turned away a little, in thought, resting one elbow on the toilet-table beside her, and covering her eyes with her hand for a moment. The beautiful, tired features were pale and drawn.

"It's very hard for me," she said, wearily. "You're both partly wrong and partly right."

"I think I'm altogether right," said Katharine.

"I know — so does he. But you're not — either of you — nor I, either, for that matter. Oh, dear! I wish I knew what to do!"

"There's nothing to be done, I'm afraid," answered the young girl, more gently, for she was somewhat pacified by her mother's owning a share in the blame. "Not that I'm going to make a fuss about it, if he doesn't. I'm not that kind. I won't come down to dinner to-night, because it would be unpleasant for everybody. As for to-morrow — we'll see what happens. The idea of shutting me up in my room so long as he's in the house, because the sight of me is disagreeable to him, it's silly — it's perfectly childish! Just like an angry man! I'm not sure that I should mind it very much, so far as not seeing him's concerned. I don't want to see him, any more than he wants to see me. But it's the principle of the thing that sticks in my throat. It's as though he had the right to treat me like a small child, to be sent

to bed in a dark room at discretion, until I change my mind. It's the tyranny of the thing, the arrogance of it — and when I'm altogether right, as you both know."

"No — not altogether," objected Mrs. Lauderdale.

"I won't go over it again, mother. I'll sum it up in these words. He's rich, and he's told us that he was poor, and he's stood looking on and letting you work to give us small luxuries that amount to necessities. He's wilfully calumniated Jack for months. He's wilfully misled Archie Wingfield —"

"My dear — about that — he assures me that he only said you might ultimately accept him —"

"Well — he knew that I mightn't, and he had no business to say I might," interrupted Katharine, decidedly. "Besides, I can hear just his tone of voice, and his way of slurring over the 'might' till Mr. Wingfield felt it was 'may' — oh, it's abominable! As for his pestering me with questions about uncle Robert's will, it's natural enough, considering how he loves money, as a cat loves cream. Oh, I know! You're going to say it's disrespectful to say such things. Perhaps it is — I don't know — he seems to lap it up — with that smile of his — and it disappears, and we have to live on the drops. No — I don't feel respectful. Why should I? I've respected him for nineteen

years, and I can't respect him any longer. It's over, once and for all. When a man deliberately sets to work to destroy his daughter's chances of being happy — oh, well! It isn't only that. It's the whole thing, the meanness, the miserliness, the Sunday-go-to-meeting-and-sit-up-straight sort of virtuous superiority outside — and all this other inside. It's revolting. It's upset all my ideas. I don't feel as though I could ever believe in anything again. I don't mean to shock you, mother, but I can't help saying it, just now."

"It's dreadful!" Mrs. Lauderdale spoke in a low voice and earnestly.

Katharine was silent for a few moments, and looked out of the window. It was almost dark by this time.

"You know, mother," she said, suddenly, "I used to admire papa — very much, in a certain way. I don't think you ever quite realized that. Of course I've been brought up in his church, though I've much more sympathy with yours. It always seems to me that his is a man's religion, and yours is a woman's. But then — Mr. Griggs says the world is a woman, in a sort of way, so yours ought to be the religion of the world. Never mind — I don't know enough to talk about these things. What I mean is this. I used to admire papa's uncompromising way of looking at life, and the way I thought he'd tell the truth and

shame the devil at any price, and his cold, unreasoning, settled certainty about heaven and hell — and the way I thought that he took his flinty goodness down town with him, and did right, when one knows that ever so many business men don't. It all seemed so strong, and cool, and manly. I couldn't help admiring it. And I believed that he was poor, and that although he wouldn't say much, he'd fight for us, and die for us, if necessary. And then — he's handsome, too, and straight, and steely, and formal. I've always liked a little formality. Do you see what I mean?"

"Of course," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, thoughtfully, and nodding her head with a far-away look in her eyes.

Katharine had enumerated the very qualities that had once appealed so strongly to her mother.

"Well — " Katharine paused a second. "It's all a sham. That's all."

Mrs. Lauderdale started at the abrupt, rough words.

"Oh, Katharine, dear, don't say that!"

"It's true. It's broken to pieces. It began to crack just before Charlotte was married. It's all broken to bits. I can see the inside of it, and it's not what I thought. There's only one idea, and that's money. It would need a miracle to make me admire him again. It's broken to atoms, and what's so strange is, that it's taken everything

with it in the last few months—and it's taken the last bit to-day. It's all gone. I can't help it. It's dreadful—but it's a sort of confession, like your confessions. I don't believe in God any more."

"My child, my child!"

Mrs. Lauderdale looked up at her with scared eyes and rising hands, which sought Katharine's, found them, and gripped them in a frightened way. The devout woman, good at heart with her one big fault, felt as though the world were quaking under her feet as she heard the last words. Not that Katharine spoke them lightly, for she was in earnest, and the declaration of unbelief was more solemn from its strangeness than almost any confession of rigid faith could have been.

"Yes, mother—I know—we won't talk about it. I only want you to understand me—we've been so much together in our lives."

She spoke sadly now.

"And we shall be, dear, I hope," answered Mrs. Lauderdale.

"I don't know—perhaps. I don't believe we shall ever be just as we used to be. You're not the same—nor am I, I suppose."

"Oh, yes we are—in our hearts. But, Katharine, darling—what you said just now—if you knew how it hurts me—"

"It's not your fault, mother. If anybody's to

blame, it's papa, and I think he is. Oh, no! You're different. After all, we're only a pair of women, you and I. We can quarrel and make up, and nobody will be hurt in the end. We're not each other's ideals — not that papa was mine, or anything like it. But you naturally believe in a thing more when a strong man stands up and asserts it and fights for it, than if it turns out that he only says that he believes in it, out of prejudice and family tradition and a sort of impression that after all he may go to the wrong place if he doesn't. He's always talking about setting an example — it seems to me that the example lies in the effect of the thing upon the person one's to imitate. If this is the effect of religion on him, I don't want it. I'd rather talk to Teddy Van De Water, who chatters about Darwin and Spencer without knowing anything particular about them, and sticks his glass in his eye and makes bad jokes about the future state, but who'd burn his hand to the wrist rather than do anything he thought mean. Men have done that sort of thing before now — they're not the men who talk about God over the soup, and try to sell their daughters at dessert!"

"Katharine —" Mrs. Lauderdale could not find words.

"I know — but papa's not here — and then, I don't mean to talk about it any longer. You've

come up from him, I suppose, mother, to say that he doesn't want to see me. Very well. I don't want to see him. But how long is this state of things to last? I won't apologize, and I suppose he won't give in. It may go on for months, then. Supposing I refuse to be imprisoned in this way, is he going to lock me in and take the key with him? What's he going to do? I want to know what to expect."

"My dear, I don't know — he only said that. Just what I told you."

"Because if it's going to be a siege, I'll go away," said Katharine, calmly.

"I proposed that you should go to Washington and spend a fortnight with Charlotte. He wouldn't hear of it."

"Yes — but if I just go without asking his leave? What will happen? What do you think? Girls often go alone, and it's only five hours by the half-past eleven train that Charlotte always takes. She'd be glad to have me, too."

"Your father would be quite capable of going and bringing you back — on Sunday."

"On Sunday!" Katharine laughed hardly. "How you know him! He wouldn't lose a day at his office, to save you or me from drowning. That's what he calls duty. Yes — perhaps he'd come, as you say. Then we should have an opportunity of fighting it out on the way back. Five hours, side

by side — but I suppose we should turn our chairs back to back and go to sleep or read. But he might not come, after all. Do you know? I should feel a sort of sense of security at the Slaybacks'. I like him, though Charlotte makes fun of him. There's something real about him. I didn't mean to go to Washington, though."

"You couldn't go to the Ralstons'," observed Mrs. Lauderdale. "With Jack at home — people would talk."

"If I went there, I should stay," answered Katharine, with a coolness that startled her mother. "I should never come back at all. Perhaps I shall some day. Who knows? No — I thought I'd go and stop with uncle Robert. That would terrify papa. He'd suppose, in the first place, that I'd tell uncle Robert everything that's happened, and then that uncle Robert would tell me a great deal more about his intentions with regard to the will. That would make papa anxious to be nice to me when I came home again, so as to get the secret out of me. I think it's a very good plan; don't you? Uncle Robert would be delighted. He's all alone and not at all strong. The very last time I saw him, he begged me to come and stay a few days. I think I will. Fancy papa's rage! He'd scarcely dare to come and get me there, I imagine."

Mrs. Lauderdale did not answer at once. She

saw the immense advantage Katharine would have over her father if she carried out the plan, and it seemed too great. Alexander would be almost at his daughter's mercy. She could dictate her own terms of peace. Incensed as she was against him, she could easily use her influence against him with his uncle, who had a lonely old man's fondness for the beautiful girl.

"Of course you could go—I couldn't prevent you," said Mrs. Lauderdale, rather helplessly.

"Of course I could. I've only to walk there. Uncle Robert will send for my things."

"I hope you won't, dear. It wouldn't make it easier for me—he'll think it's been my fault, you know—and then—"

Katharine looked at her mother in silence for a moment, and pitied her too much, even after what had passed between them, to leave her to Alexander's temper.

"I won't go yet," said Katharine. "I won't go unless he's perfectly intractable. Go and tell him that it's all right, mother. I'll submit quietly and stay in my room as long as he's in the house—quite as much for my own sake as for his, you can tell him. If he asks about my apologizing, tell him that I won't, and that I expect an apology from him. It can't last forever. One of us will have to give in, at the end—but I won't. You can put it all as mildly as you like, only don't

give him any impression that I'm submitting to him morally, even if I'm willing to keep out of his way."

"Couldn't you say something a little nicer than that, dear?" asked Mrs. Lauderdale, pleadingly, for she anticipated more trouble. "Couldn't you say that you'd let by-gones be by-gones — or something of that sort?"

"It wouldn't be true. These are not by-gones. They're present things. The nice by-gones will never come back."

Mrs. Lauderdale rose slowly to the height of her still graceful figure, and stood before her daughter for a moment. In the emotion of the past hour she had forgotten for a time her envy of the girl's blossoming beauty. For a moment she was impelled to throw her arms round Katharine's neck in the old way, and kiss her, and try to make things again what they had been. But something hard in the young grey eyes stopped her. She felt that she herself was not forgiven yet and might never be, altogether.

"Very well," she said, quietly. "I'll do my best."

She turned and left the room, leaving Katharine still leaning back against the chest of drawers in the position she had not abandoned throughout the conversation.

When Katharine was alone, she stood up, turned

round and pulled out the upper drawer. Amongst her gloves and handkerchiefs lay a photograph of John Ralston. She took it out and looked at the keen, dark face, with its set lips, its prominent bony temples, and its nervous lines that would be furrows too soon.

"You're worth all the Lauderdales and the Wingfields put together!" she said, in a low voice.

She kissed the photograph, pressing it hard to her lips and closing her eyes.

"I wish you were here!" she said.

She looked at it again, and again kissed it. Then she put it back with an energetic movement that was almost rough, and shut the drawer. She sat down in the chair her mother had occupied, and gave herself up to thinking over all that had taken place.

Her instinct was to let John Ralston know as soon as possible what had happened, but she knew how foolish that would be. He would insist that the moment had come for declaring their marriage, and that she must go and live under his mother's roof. But she felt that something must be done soon. If she was willing to submit to her father's sentence, absurd as it was, she found a reason for doing so in her own disinclination to meet him. But the situation could not last. And yet, he was obstinate beyond ordinarily obstinate people, and it would be like him to insist upon banishing

her for a week. In such things he had no sense of the ridiculous. Apart from the inconvenience and constant annoyance of being expected to keep out of his way, she was young enough to feel humiliated. It was very like a punishment — this order not to be seen when her father was in the house. She had no intention of disregarding it, however. To do so would have been to produce an open war of which the rumour would fill society. It was clear that her best course was to be patient as long as possible, and then quietly to go to uncle Robert's house. The world would think it natural that she should pay him a visit. She had done so before.

Alexander Junior seemed to be satisfied with the answer his wife brought him. He felt that if he could make Katharine stay in her own room at his discretion, he was still master in his own house, and his injured dignity began to hold up its head again. The old philanthropist did not even ask after Katharine at dinner, though he was fond of her. She so often went out to dine alone with intimate friends, that it did not occur to him to remark upon her absence. But, as usual, when she was not there, the family meal was dull and silent. Alexander ate without speaking, and with the methodical, grimly appreciative appetite of very strong men. Mrs. Lauderdale was not hungry, and stared at the silver things on the table

most of the time. The old gentleman bolted his food in the anticipation of tobacco, which tasted best after eating. He was a cheerful old soul when he was not dreaming, an optimist and a professed maker of happiness by the ton, so to say, for those who had been forgotten in the distribution. He had big hands, shiny at the knuckles and pink where a young man's would be white, with horny, yellowish nails, and he was not very neat in his dress, though he had survived from the day when men used to wear dress coats and white ties in their offices all day. The Lauderdale tribe regarded him as a harmless member who had something wrong in his head, while his heart was almost too much in the right place. A certain amount of respect was shown him on account of his age, but though he was the oldest of them all, Robert the Rich was undisputedly the head of the family. It was generally believed, and, as has been seen, the belief was well founded, that he was not to have any large share of the money in case he survived his brother.

Early on the following morning Alexander Junior emerged from his dressing-room, equipped for the day. He wore the garments of civilization, but a very little power of imagination might have converted his dark grey trousers into greaves, his morning coat into a shirt of mail, and his stiff collar into a steel throat-piece. He had slept on his

wrath, and had grown more obstinate with the grey of the morning. His voice was metallic and aggressive when he spoke to the serving-girl, demanding why his steak was overdone. When his wife appeared, he rose formally, as usual, and kissed her cheek with a little click, like the lock of a safe. He said little or nothing as he finished his breakfast, and then, without telling her what he meant to do, he went upstairs again and knocked at Katharine's door.

"Katharine!" he called to her. "I wish to speak to you."

"Well—" answered the young girl's voice—
"I'm not dressed yet. What is it?"

"How long shall you be?" enquired Alexander, bending his brows as he leaned against the panel to catch her answer.

"About three quarters of an hour—I should think—at least—judging from the state of my hair. It's all tangled."

"Do you know what time it is?"

"No—I've not looked. Oh—my little clock has stopped. It's a quarter past four by my little clock."

"It's nine o'clock," said Alexander Junior, severely. "Three minutes to," he added, looking at his watch.

"Well—I can't help it now. It's only—no—it's sixteen minutes past four by my little clock."

"Never mind your little clock. I must be going down town at once, and I wish to speak to you. I can't wait three quarters of an hour."

"No — of course not."

"Well — can't I come in? Aren't you visible?"

"No. Certainly not. You can't come in. I'm brushing — my hair. I always brush it — ten minutes."

"Katharine — this is absurd!" cried Alexander, becoming exasperated. "Put on something and open the door."

"No. I can't just — now." Her phrases were interrupted by the process of vigorous brushing. "Besides — you can talk through the door. I can hear — every word — you say. Can't you hear me?"

"Yes, I can hear you. But I don't wish to say what I have to say in the hearing of the whole house."

"Oh!" The soft sound of the brushing ceased. "In that case I'd rather not hear it at all."

"Katharine!" Alexander felt all his anger of the previous day rising again.

"Yes — what is it?" She seemed to have come nearer to the door.

"I told you. I wish to speak to you."

"Yes — I know. But you can't unless you'll say it through the door."

"Katharine! Don't exasperate me!"

"I'm not trying to. I understood that you didn't wish to see me for some days. If you'd sent me word, I should have been ready to receive you. As it is, I can't."

"You know perfectly well that you can, in ten minutes, if you please. I shall send your mother to you."

"Oh — very well. I've not seen her this morning. But you'd better not wait till I'm dressed. It will take a long time."

"Very well," answered Alexander Junior, who had completely lost his temper by this time.

A moment later Katharine heard the sharp click of the lock, and the rattle as the key was withdrawn. She never used it, having a bolt on the inside.

"You are at liberty to take all day if you please," said her father. "I have the key in my pocket. Good morning."

Katharine's lips parted in astonishment, as she turned her eyes towards the door, and she stood staring at it for a moment in speechless indignation, realizing that she was locked in for the day. Then, suddenly, her expression changed, and she laughed aloud. Alexander was already far down the stairs.

But presently she realized that the situation was serious, or, at all events, something more than annoying. She was to be shut up at least until

after five o'clock in the afternoon, all alone, without food or drink, without the books she wanted, and without any one with whom to exchange a few words. Her face became grave as she finished dressing. She knew also that her father had lost his temper again, and she did not care to have all the servants know it.

She rang the bell, and waited by the door till she heard the maid's footsteps outside.

"Ask my mother to come here a moment, Jane," she said. "Say that it's important."

A few moments later Mrs. Lauderdale turned the handle of the lock.

"Is that you, mother?" asked Katharine.

"Yes. The door's locked. I can't open it."

"This is serious," said Katharine, speaking in a low voice, close to the panel. "Papa's locked it and taken the key down town with him. Didn't he tell you?"

"No — it's impossible, child! You must have slipped the bolt inside."

"But, mother, he said he meant to, and I heard him do it. He got angry because I wouldn't let him in. I couldn't then, for I wasn't dressed, and Jane's putting a new ribbon on my dressing-gown, so I haven't even got that. But I didn't want to. Never mind that — I'll tell you by and by. The question is how I'm to get out! Unless he didn't quite mean it, and has left the key on the table

in the entry, with the latch-key. You might look."

Mrs. Lauderdale went downstairs and searched for the key, but in vain. Katharine was locked in.

CHAPTER X.

MRS. LAUDERDALE was indignant. Katharine, at least, had been able to see the ludicrous side of the situation, and had laughed to herself on finding that she was locked in. Less conventional than either her father or mother, it had occurred to her for a moment that she was acting a part in an amusing comedy. The idea that by one or two absurd phrases she had so irritated Alexander as to make him forget his dignity and his common sense together, and do a thoroughly foolish thing such as a child in a passion might do, was funny in the extreme, she thought. But Mrs. Lauderdale, being called in, as it were, after the play, thought the result very poor fun indeed. In her opinion, her husband had done a senseless thing, in the worst possible taste.

Fortunately the house was an old one, and the simple, old-fashioned lock was amenable to keys which did not belong to it. In due time, Mrs. Lauderdale found one which served the purpose, and Katharine was set at liberty.

"This is just a little more than I can bear," she said, as her mother entered the room. "I didn't

expect this sort of thing last night when I said I wouldn't go to uncle Robert's. Really — papa's losing his head."

"I must say, it's going rather far," admitted Mrs. Lauderdale.

"It's gone a great deal too far," Katharine answered. "I laughed when I found I was locked in. It seemed so funny. But I won't let him do it again."

"You two have a faculty for irritating each other that's beyond anything," observed Mrs. Lauderdale. "It really would be much better if you could be separated for a little while. My dear, what do you suppose could happen, if you went to uncle Robert's?"

"Just what I told you yesterday. Papa would be quite bland when I came home again. By that time he could have got over his rage, and he'd want to know things — oh, well! I won't talk about all that. It only hurts you, and it can't do any good, can it? Hadn't I better go up to uncle Robert's and ask if he can have me? Meanwhile, Jane could pack a few things — just what I need to-day — I can always come down, or send down, and get anything I want at a moment's notice. Shan't I, mother? What do you think?"

"Well — I don't quite know, child. Of course I ought not to, but then if I don't —" She paused, conscious of vagueness. "If I don't let you go,"

she continued, "there'll be worse trouble before long. This is an impossible position, we know, and if you went to Washington, I'm sure he'd go down on Sunday and bring you back. It was very clever of you to think of going to uncle Robert's."

"I could go to the Crowdies'," said Katharine, meditatively. "Of course, Hester's my best friend, but I do hate her husband so—I can't help it."

Walter Crowdie was a distinguished young painter, whose pale face and heavy, red mouth were unaccountably repulsive to Katharine, and, in a less degree, to her mother also. Mrs. Crowdie was Hamilton Bright's sister, and therefore a distant cousin.

"And papa might insist on bringing me back from there, too. There are lots of reasons against it. Besides — Hamilton —"

"What about Hamilton?" asked Mrs. Lauderdale.

"Oh, nothing! Mother — I don't want to do violent things and make a fuss, and all that, you know — but if you agree, and think it's sensible, I will go up and ask uncle Robert if I may stay a few days. You can see, yourself, that all this can't go on much longer."

In her resentment of her father's behaviour, she felt quite reconciled with her mother, and Mrs. Lauderdale was glad as she realized the fact. There was an underthought in her mind, too,

which was perhaps not altogether so creditable. Though it was only to be for a few days, Katharine was to be away from her. She was to have a breathing space from the temptation which tormented her. For a little while she should be herself again, not contrasted, at every turn of her daily life, with that terrible bloom which ever outshone the fading flower of her own beauty. That was her dream. If she could but be supremely beautiful still for one short month — that was all she asked — after that, she would submit to time, and give up the pride of life, and never complain again. She would not have acknowledged to herself that this was a motive, for she honestly did her best to fight her sin; but it was there, nevertheless, and influenced her to agree the more readily to Katharine's absence. It counteracted, indeed, the anxiety she felt about her husband's view of the case when he should return from his office late in the afternoon; but her instinct told her, also, that he might very probably be a little ashamed of what he had done, and be secretly glad of the solution unexpectedly offered him.

Katharine got ready to go in a few minutes. As she put on her hat and gloves, she glanced two or three times at the bit of red ribbon that lay on her toilet-table. She had taken down the signal from the window on the previous evening, in order to inform John Ralston that she could not come that

morning. On the whole, she was glad that she could not see him, for it would be hard to conceal from him what had happened. She would send him a message down town, and he could see her, undisturbed, at their uncle's house in the afternoon — more freely there than anywhere else, indeed, since Robert Lauderdale was in the secret of the clandestine marriage.

Before she left the house, Mrs. Lauderdale laid her hands upon the girl's shoulders and looked into her eyes with an anxious expression.

"Katharine, dear," she said, "don't ever let yourself think such things as you said yesterday afternoon."

"What things, mother?"

"About not believing — you know. You didn't mean what you said, darling, of course — and I'm not preaching to you. You know I promised long ago that I would never talk about religion to you children, nor influence you. I've kept my word. But this is different. Religion — well, we don't all agree in this world. But God — God's for everybody, just the same, dear. But then," she added, quickly, "I know you didn't really mean what you said. Only keep the thought away, when it comes."

Katharine said nothing, but she nodded gravely and kissed her mother on both cheeks. At the last moment, as she was going to the door, she stopped and turned back.

"I'm awfully sorry to bother you, mother dear," she said, "but I've got no money — not even twenty-five cents. Could you give me something? I don't like to be out with nothing at all in my pocket."

The deprecating tone, the real, earnest regret at being obliged to ask for even such a trifle, told the tale of what had gone on in the house, unknown to the world, for years, far better than any words could have done.

"Of course, child — I always have something, you know," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, promptly. "Here are ten dollars."

"Oh — I don't want so much!" cried Katharine. "I'm not going to buy anything — it's only for horse-cars, and things like that. Give me a dollar and a little change, if you have it."

But Mrs. Lauderdale insisted that she should take the note.

"I don't want you to go to uncle Robert's without a penny in your pocket. It looks like poor relations."

"Well — you're always generous, mother," answered the young girl, with a little laugh. "But it's papa's relation, and not yours."

"I know, dear — I know. But it makes no difference."

As Katharine had anticipated, Robert Lauderdale was very glad to see her. He was sitting in

his library, into which the sun streamed through the high windows, one of which was partly opened to let in the spring freshness.

She thought he looked ill. He had not recovered from the effects of his illness so quickly as Doctor Routh had expected, owing to a certain weakness of the heart, natural enough at his age and after enduring so severe a strain. His appetite had never returned, and he was thin in the body and almost wasted in the face. If anything, Katharine thought he looked worse than when she had last seen him a few days previously. But he welcomed her with a cheery smile, and she sat down beside him.

"Come to pay me a little visit?" His voice was oddly hollow. "That's right! I wish you'd stay with me a few days again. But then, you're too gay, I suppose."

"Not at all too gay," laughed Katharine. "That's exactly what I want to do, and why I came at this hour. I wanted to ask if you'd have me for a week, and then, if you would, I was going to send for my things. And now you've spoken first, and I accept. My things are all ready," she added, still smiling. "You see, I knew you'd let me come."

"Of course, little girl!" answered the old man, his sunken eyes fixing themselves wistfully on her young face. "Ring for Leek and tell him to send a man down at once."

"Oh — there's no hurry about it. I made myself as beautiful as I could before starting — but I want to dazzle you at dinner. You sit up for dinner, don't you? How are you, uncle, dear? Better?"

"Yes — yes," he answered, slowly. "I suppose I'm better. But it's slow work. Yes, I sit up for dinner. It makes the days shorter. They're so long. You look pale, my dear. What's the matter? Too much dancing? Too much flirting? Or what?"

"I never flirt, uncle Robert!" Katharine laughed again.

"Well, then, it's time you began, and you'd better begin at once — with me."

And the old gentleman laughed, too, a queer hollow laugh that seemed to come from his backbone, with a rattle in it. And he laid two of his great bony fingers against the young girl's pale, fresh cheek — as though death played with life, and would like to kiss it.

So they chatted pleasantly together in the morning sunshine amongst the grand old books which the rich man had collected about him. Katharine had no intention of telling him what had happened in Clinton Place, if she could help it. Uncle Robert did not seem to require any reason for her sudden determination to pay him a visit, as she had done before on more than one occasion. He

was glad enough to have her, whatever her reasons might be.

Katharine breathed the atmosphere of freedom and revived. The certainty that for several days, at least, the perpetual contest with her father was not to be renewed, brought colour to her cheeks and light to her eyes. But as the time wore on towards the hour for luncheon, and she came and went, and alternately talked with the old man and read aloud to him a little and sat in silence, watching his face, the conviction came over her that he could never get back his strength. The vitality was gone out of him, and he had grown listless. She could not tell whether he might live much longer, or not, but she felt that he had lost something which he could never regain.

"You feel stronger, don't you?" she asked, in an encouraging tone.

He did not answer at once, but looked at her affectionately and dreamily.

"Don't be worried about me, dear girl," he said, at last. "I'm doing very well."

"No, but really—" Katharine's face took an anxious expression.

"Really?" he repeated, looking at her still. Then his head fell back against the dark red cushion. "I'm not dead yet," he said, quietly. "But it's coming — it's coming by inches."

"Don't say that!"

But she knew it was true, and she began to talk of other things. He, however, seemed inclined to come back to the subject of his failing strength.

"I should be better if they didn't bother me," he said. "They keep coming to see whether I'm alive, and sending messages to enquire. Confound them!" he exclaimed, with a momentary return of energy. "They couldn't send more flowers if the undertaker were in the house! What does an old fellow like me want of flowers, I should like to know? They may turn my grave into a flower show if they like, when I'm tucked away in it, but I wish they'd leave me alone till I am!"

"Who are they?" asked Katharine, with some curiosity.

"The tribe, as you call the family. Your mother's one. Didn't she tell you she sent me flowers?"

"No — I'll tell her not to."

"Don't do that, little girl. You just let her alone. If she were the only one — I shouldn't care. I wouldn't hurt her feelings for anything, you know — and then, it means something when she sends them, because she works for them and earns the money. But why the dickens the three Miss Miners should think it necessary to send me American Beauties in cardboard boxes, I can't conceive. They're comfortably off enough, now, but that's no reason, and they can't stand the

expense of that sort of thing long. Perhaps they think it won't last long. Of course it's well meant. I made Beman give them a lift with some little stocks they had lying round, and he took an interest in the thing, I suppose, for I hear that they're very comfortable — ten thousand a year amongst the four of them, with Frank — and I suppose he earns something with all his writings, doesn't he?"

"Oh, yes. *The Century* gave him a hundred and fifty dollars for an article the other day. He was so pleased! You have no idea!"

"I daresay," said the great millionaire, gravely. "Very nice, too — a hundred and fifty for one article. Well — he's another. He sends me all he writes — there's a heap of things on the table, there. That's his corner, you know, because he's the literary man of the family. And he scribbles me little notes with them. He's rather humble about his work — for he says he'd really be glad if anything he turned out could help to pass the time for me. Well — it's nice of him, I know. But it irritates me, somehow. As for that Crowdie, he's the worst of the lot — as he's the cleverest. By the bye, what day is to-day — Thursday, isn't it?"

"Yes — it's Thursday. Why?"

"Well — he's coming before luncheon to-day. It appears that he's painted a picture of you. I

think you said something about it last winter, didn't you?"

"Yes. I told you I was sitting to him. He painted it for Hester. She's my great friend, you know."

"Oh, yes — so she is — so she is! Well — that's a singular thing, too. He said in his last note that it was for me."

"Did he?" Katharine laughed. "You'd better take it, uncle dear — that is, if you want it. It's a good picture."

"Everything the young scoundrel does is good!" growled the old man. "Do you like him, child?"

"Like him! I perfectly loathe him — but I can't tell why," she added, in quick apology. "He's always very kind."

"I don't see how Walter Crowdie can be kind to my niece," said Robert Lauderdale, with rough pride. "Anyhow, he wants to get something out of me. So he's bringing the picture to me this morning. I told you what I meant to do for them in my will. I don't see why I should do anything. They're rich, those people. She had money and he gets big prices, and I'll do him the credit to say he's industrious, at all events. He seems to be a good husband to Hester, too — isn't he?"

"She adores him," answered Katharine.

"Well — I suppose I'm like you. I can't tell why I dislike the man, but I do. It's a case of

'Doctor Fell.' Yes — there's Crowdie, and the Miners — even Ham Bright — he's always enquiring and leaving cards! As for your father, he writes me long letters once a week, as though I were abroad, and he comes to see me every Sunday afternoon at four o'clock, rain or shine."

"Oh — that's where he goes!" cried Katharine. "I often wondered — he always disappears on Sunday afternoon."

"Yes — he comes here and tells me what a solid thing the Trust Company is, and how he's devoting his life to it, and sacrificing his chances of getting rich, so as to be useful. Oh, it's very fine, I admit. But then, he never says anything about that money of his which he keeps put away. And I never say anything about it, either. What's the use — it would only make him uncomfortable."

"But you're quite sure he has it, uncle Robert, aren't you?" asked Katharine. "You're not doing him an injustice?"

"Yes. I've seen it."

"What — the money? I don't understand."

"I've seen the value of a million of money in United States Bonds, which were the property of your father," answered the old man. "I won't tell you how it happened, because a banker accidentally betrayed your father's confidence. It was at the time of a conversion of bonds, two years ago. For some reason or other, Alexander — your

father — couldn't attend to it, or do it all himself. I don't know why. Anyhow, he employed a banker confidentially, and I came to know the fact, and I saw the bonds. So that settles it. He's not squandered a million on your clothes in the last two years, has he, little girl?"

"Hardly!" Katharine laughed. "But mightn't it have been trust money, or something like that?"

"No. His name was there. He's a careful man — your father. So it couldn't have been a trust. Well — I was going through the list, wasn't I? I haven't half finished. There's your grandfather. Sandy never had much sense when he was a boy. He was all heart. I suppose he knows I'm dying, and wants me to give my soul a lift in the shape of some liberal contributions to his charities. I wish you could see the piles of reports he sends, and letters without end — in his queer, shaky hand. 'Dear old Bob; what's a million, more or less, to you, and it would make ten thousand homes happy.' That's the sort of thing. Ten thousand idiots! Give them all a hundred dollars apiece — of course they'd be happy, for a week or two. Sandy forgets the headaches they'd have afterwards. He believes everything's good, and everybody's an angel, more or less disguised, but recognizable. Well — I suppose it's better to be an optimist. They're the happy people, after all."

"Do you think so? I don't know. People who are always happy can't ever feel how happy they are sometimes, as unhappy people do. That's what's so nice about being sad — now and then, when one feels gay, the world's a ball of sunshine. Haven't you felt like that sometimes? I do."

"Sometimes — sometimes," repeated the old man, with a faint smile. "Not lately. I've had so many cares. Great wealth complicates the end of life, Katharine. You'll be very rich. Remember that. Have your fortune settled so that it can be easily handled when you're old. That's what I've done, and it's something, at all events. If I had to be picking up odds and ends and loose threads now, it would be harder than it is. And perhaps I've made a mistake. Perhaps it's better to tell people just what they have to expect. People worry so! Now there are all the Miners' rich relations, you know — the Thirlwalls and the Van De Waters, and all that set. I don't know what they think, I'm sure. They've got heaps of money, and there's no reason on earth why I should leave them a dollar. But they worry. Ruth Van De Water comes and brings flowers — always flowers — I make Leek take them away — I suppose he decorates the pantry with them — and she says her mother would so much like to take me to drive when it's warmer. Why? What for? And one of the Thirlwalls sent me some cigars he'd

brought from Havana with him, and old Mrs. Trehearne — the one who's 'old' Mrs. Trehearne now, since her sister-in-law died — didn't she toddle in the other day and say she wanted to talk about old times! — she's another of those holy scarecrows that hang round death-beds. Now, she's nothing on earth to expect of me. It's sheer love of worry, I believe."

"People may be fond of you for your own sake," suggested Katharine. "You don't know how nice you are! That is — when you like!"

"Well — I don't know. It may be — but I doubt it. You see, I've had a good deal of experience in the way of being liked."

"Has it been all a bad experience? You can't tell me that nobody ever liked you for your own sake — never, at all. I shouldn't believe it. The world can't be all bad, right through."

"Oh, no! I didn't say that. And I suppose I shouldn't say anything that looks like cynicism to you, child. Still, I must say there's a good deal of personal interest in the affection a rich man gets. I used to hear that said when I was a boy, and there's a good deal about it in old-fashioned books, but I didn't believe it. It's money that makes the world go, Katharine, my dear. It's love for one year, perhaps, but it's money all the other sixty-nine out of the seventy. I've seen a deal of money earned and squandered, and stolen

and wasted in my time, and there's no denying it — money's the main object. It keeps the world going, and when it gets stuck in one place, as it has in my hands, there's an attempt — a natural attempt, I suppose — to distribute it again. And if it doesn't get distributed, there's a howl of pain from all the relations. It's natural — it's natural — but it doesn't make dying easier."

"Don't talk about dying, uncle dear — there's no reason for —"

The door opened, and Leek, the butler, appeared.

"Mr. Crowdie asks if you'll see him, sir," he said. "He says he wrote that he was coming this morning, sir."

"Yes — yes. I know. Show him in, Leek." The butler disappeared. "I'm sorry we don't like him," added the old gentleman, with a rather weary smile. "But I want to see your picture. You said it was good?"

"Very."

There was the short silence of expectancy which precedes the entry of a visitor, and then the door opened again and Crowdie came in. He was of average height, but ill made, slightly in-kneed and weak-shouldered, neither thin nor stout; pale, with a pear-shaped face and bright red lips, beautiful brown eyes and silky brown hair which was a little too long. His hands and feet were small — the

hands being very white, with pointed fingers, and they looked soft. He dressed well.

"It's so kind of you to let me come, sir," he said, as he shook hands. "I hope you're really better. Why, Miss Lauderdale, I didn't expect to see you! How do you do?"

"Thanks — how do you do? I'm staying here, you know."

Old Lauderdale pointed to a seat. He had shaken hands with the painter, but had not spoken.

"Yes," he said, as Crowdie sat down, "as my niece is here, we can compare her with her portrait. I'm very much obliged to you for thinking of giving it to me, I'm sure. I hope you've brought it."

Crowdie had grasped the situation at a glance.

"It was meant for my wife — she's Miss Lauderdale's most intimate friend, you know," he said, with fine frankness. "But we consulted about it, and we decided that I should offer you this one and do another for her from the sketches I have. May I have it brought in? It's rather a big thing, I'm afraid."

"By all means, let's see it," said the old man, touching the bell at his elbow as Crowdie rose. "The men will bring it in all right — you needn't go, Mr. Crowdie."

Crowdie went towards the door, however, with an artist's instinctive anxiety for the safety of his

work, and while he was turned away Robert Lauderdale's eyes met Katharine's. They both smiled a little at the same moment, admiring the quick-witted ingenuity with which Crowdie had turned the difficulty of presenting the portrait to the old man while Katharine, to whom he had said that it was for her friend,—his wife,—sat looking on.

Two footmen, marshalled and directed by Leek, brought in the picture.

"Set it up on this arm-chair," said Crowdie. "It will be quite steady—so—a little more to the light—the least bit the other way—that'll do—thanks. Can you see it well?" he asked, turning to the other two.

"It's a good picture, isn't it?" asked Katharine, after they had both gazed at it in silence for a full minute.

"It's wonderful!" exclaimed the old man, in genuine admiration. "It's a great picture, Mr. Crowdie. I congratulate you—and myself—and the young lady here," he added, laying his hand on Katharine's arm as she sat beside him.

Crowdie was pleased. He knew very well, by long experience, when admiration was real and when it was feigned. Of late years, the true note had rarely failed in the chorus of approval. Whatever he might be as a man, he was a thorough artist, and a very good one, too.

"I'm so glad you like it yourself, Miss Lauderdale," he said, coming nearer to her as he spoke. "That's always a test."

"Yes—I do like it. But—I suppose I ought not to criticise—ought I? I don't know anything about it."

"Oh, yes, you do. I should like to hear what you think. You've not seen it for two or three weeks, and then it was in the studio. You've got a new impression of it now. Tell me—won't you?"

"Well—you don't mind? Really not? Then I'll tell you. I think you've put something of Hester into me. Look at it. Do you see it yourself?"

"No—frankly, I don't," answered Crowdie, but a change came over his face as he spoke—a mere shadow of amusement, a slight thickening of the heavy red lips.

"It's in the eyes and the mouth," continued Katharine. "I don't know exactly what it is, but it reminds me of Hester in such an odd way—as I've seen her look sometimes. There's a little sort of drawing down of the eyelids at the corners and up in the middle, with a kind of passionate, longing look she has now and then. Don't you see it? And the mouth—I don't know—it reminds me of her, too—the lips just parted a little—as though they wanted something—the

way one looks at big strawberries on the table before they're served — ” Katharine laughed.

“ Yes — but that's just the way you looked,” protested Crowdie. “ Doesn't Miss Lauderdale raise her eyes just in that way, Mr. Lauderdale? ” he asked, turning to the old gentleman.

“ Oh, no! ” laughed Katharine. “ I never look like that. I keep my mouth shut and glare straight at people.”

“ It seems to me to be very like,” said the old man, bending forward with his great head on one side and his hands on his knees, as he looked at the portrait.

“ It's a great picture, anyway — whether it's like me or not,” said Katharine.

She was too unaffected to make any foolish remarks about being flattered too much. She accepted the fact that she was good-looking, and said nothing about it. Crowdie reflected for a moment, wishing to turn a graceful compliment upon her last speech, but he could think of nothing new. His mind was preoccupied by the discovery she had made of a fact by no means new to himself nor, perhaps, wholly unintentional.

“ Where shall we hang it, Mr. Crowdie? ” asked the old gentleman, at last.

“ Ah — that's an important question. Where should you like it, sir? ”

Crowdie occasionally introduced a ‘sir’ when

he addressed the millionaire, by way of hinting, perhaps, that he considered him to be the head of the family, though his only connection was through his wife, and that was a distant one. Hester Crowdie's maternal great-grandfather had been Robert Lauderdale's uncle.

"I should like it near me," said the old man. "Couldn't we have it in this room?"

"Why not? Just where it is, if you like it there. I'll get you an easel and a bit of stuff to drape it with in an hour."

"An easel? H'm — that's not very neat, is it? An easel out in the middle of the room — I don't know how that would look."

"What difference does it make — if you'd like it here?" asked Katharine.

"That's true, child — why shouldn't I have what I like?" asked the old millionaire.

Crowdie laughed.

"If anybody has the right and the power to please himself, you have," he said. "Miss Lauderdale, would you mind sitting down beside the picture for a moment? I want to have a good look at it once more — I should just like to see if I can find that resemblance to Hester."

"Certainly."

Katharine sat down, assuming easily enough the attitude she had been accustomed to during a number of sittings. Crowdie drew back and

looked at her. Then he came to her again and put out his hand towards her hair, but instantly withdrew it.

"I remember," he said, quickly, but in a low voice. "You don't like me to touch it. Would you raise your hair a little—on the sides? You know how it was."

She looked up into his face and saw the expression she detested—a sort of disagreeable smile on the heavy red lips. The feeling of repulsion was so strong that she almost shivered. Crowdie drew back and looked again.

"I can't see it—for the life of me!" said Crowdie, with a little laugh. "If you'll excuse me, Mr. Lauderdale, I'll go and get the easel at once."

"Yes—do!" said Katharine.

"Well—but—won't you stay to luncheon, Mr. Crowdie?" asked the old man.

"Thanks—I should like to—but I've got a sitter coming. You're very kind. I'll bring the easel myself."

"Thank you very much. See you by and by, then," answered Mr. Lauderdale.

When Crowdie was gone, the old man looked long and earnestly at the picture. Gradually what Katharine meant by the resemblance to Hester dawned upon him, and he knit his bushy white eyebrows.

"I'm sorry you told me," he said, at last. "I see it now — what you mean — and I don't like it."

"Somehow — I don't know — it looks like a woman who's been through something — I don't know exactly what. Perhaps it is like an older woman — a married woman."

"H'm — perhaps so. I think it is. Anyhow, I don't like it."

CHAPTER XI.

IT was the habit of Robert Lauderdale, since he had been ill, to rest two hours before dinner, a fact of which Katharine was well aware, and she had sent a message to John Ralston begging him to come and see her when he came up town after business hours. But she did not mean to let him come without informing the old gentleman. Before he retired to his room late in the afternoon, she spoke to him about it.

"Of course, of course, my dear," he answered quickly, in his hollow voice. "He may spend the day here, if he likes—and if you like."

"Well, you see," said Katharine, "I've not seen him since yesterday morning. You know, since he's been going regularly to business, he's not free in the daytime as he used to be. And as for letting him come to Clinton Place when papa's at home, it's simply out of the question."

"Is it? Do you mean to say it's as bad as that?"

"Yes—it's pretty bad," Katharine answered, thoughtfully. "We've not been getting on very well, papa and I. That's why I came to you so

suddenly to-day, without warning. My mother thought it would be better."

"Oh — she did, did she?" The old man closed his eyes, as though thinking it over. "And she's generally a peacemaker," he continued, after a moment. "That's a sign that she thinks the situation strained, as the politicians say. What's happened, little girl?"

"I don't want to tell you all the details. It's a long story, and wouldn't interest you. But they got it into their heads that I ought to marry Mr. Wingfield — you know — Archie Wingfield — the beauty — and of course I refused him. That was yesterday afternoon. And then — oh, I don't know — there was a scene, and papa got angry, and so this morning after he'd gone down town I consulted with my mother and came here. I only wanted you to know — that's all."

The old gentleman was silent for some time after she had finished speaking.

"I wish you'd induce Jack to stay here, and announce your marriage under my roof," he said at last, in a low voice. "I'd like to see it all settled before — Katharine, child, feel my pulse, will you?"

Katharine started a little, and leaned forward quickly, and laid her firm white fingers on the bony wrist.

"Can you find it?" he asked, rather anxiously.

"No—yes—wait a moment—don't speak!" She held her breath, her eyes fixed upon his grey face as she pressed the point where she thought the pulse should be. "Yes—there it is!" she exclaimed suddenly, in a tone of relief. "It's all right, uncle Robert, only I couldn't find it at first. I can feel it quite distinctly now. Does it always go so fast as that?"

"It's going very fast, isn't it? I have a little fluttering—at my heart."

"Shan't I send for Doctor Routh?" asked Katharine, with renewed anxiety.

"Oh, no—it's no use." His voice was growing perceptibly more feeble. "I shall be better presently," he whispered, and closed his eyes again. Then, as though fearing lest his whisper should frighten her, he made an effort and spoke aloud again. "It often happens," he said. "Don't be afraid, little girl."

Katharine had no experience of sickness, and did not know the danger of that fluttering at the heart in such a case. She thought he knew better than she whether he needed anything or not, and that it would be wiser not to annoy him with questions. She was used to manly men who said what they wished and nothing more. He lay back in his big chair, breathing with some difficulty. A deep furrow appeared between his eyebrows, which gave his face an expression of pain,

and his jaw dropped a little, making his cheeks look more hollow. Katharine sat quite still for several minutes.

"Are you suffering, uncle dear?" she asked at last, bending to his ear.

He shook his head slowly, opened his eyes a little and closed them again.

"I shall be better in a minute," he said, a moment later.

He revived very slowly, as she sat there watching him, and as the furrow disappeared from his brow and his mouth closed, the look of life came back to his face. He was a strong old man, and, though little attached to life, was to die hard. He opened his eyes at last and looked at Katharine, smiling a little.

"I think I'll go to my room," he said. "It's my time for resting, you know. Perhaps I've been up a little too long."

To Katharine's surprise, he was able to stand when Leek and the footman came to help him, and to walk without much difficulty. She followed the little procession to the door of his bedroom and saw Mrs. Deems come and take charge of him. He turned his head slowly towards Katharine and smiled before the door closed.

"It's all right, little girl," he said.

She went downstairs again and returned to the library. It faced the south and was still warm

with the sunshine. She sat down again in the chair she had occupied before. Presently her eyes turned instinctively to her portrait. Crowdie had brought the easel while she and her uncle had been at luncheon, and had arranged it himself. He had come into the dining-room, and after exchanging a few more words, had gone away again.

She gazed at the beautiful features, now that she was alone with it, and the feeling of dislike and repulsion grew stronger, till she felt something like what she experienced when she looked at Crowdie's pale face and red mouth. She felt that he had put something into the painting which had no right there, which he had no right to imagine — yet she could not tell what it was. Presently she rose and glanced round the room in search of a looking-glass. But old Lauderdale did not like mirrors, and there was none in the library. On the table, however, stood a photograph of herself in a silver frame. She seized it as soon as she saw it and held it up in her hand, comparing it with the portrait. She found it hard to tell where the difference lay, unless it was in the eyelids and the slight parting of the lips, but she felt it and disliked it more and more.

At that moment the door was opened by one of the footmen.

"Mr. Ralston," said the man, announcing John, who entered immediately afterwards.

The door closed behind him as he came forward. Katharine's heart jumped, as she became conscious of his presence. It was as though a strong current of life had been turned upon her after having been long alone with death. Ralston moved easily, with the freedom that comes naturally of good proportions. His bright brown eyes gleamed with pleasure, and the hard, defiant lines of the lean face relaxed in a rare smile.

He kissed her tenderly, with a nervous, passionate lightness that belongs only to finely organized beings, twice or three times. And then she kissed him once with all her heart, and looked into the eyes she loved.

"How good it is to have this chance!" he exclaimed, happily. "This is better than South Fifth Avenue at nine o'clock in the morning—isn't it? Why didn't we think of it before?"

"I can't be always stopping with uncle Robert, you know," answered Katharine. "I wish I could."

Something in the tone of the last words attracted his attention. With a gentle touch he made her turn her face to the light, and looked at her.

"What's happened?" he asked, suddenly. "There's been some trouble, I know. Tell me—you've had more worry at home, haven't you?"

"Oh — it's nothing!" Katharine answered, lightly. "You see how easy it is for me to get away. What does it matter?"

"Yes — but there has been something," insisted John, shaking his head. "I don't like this, Katharine."

He turned away from her, and his eyes fell upon the portrait. It instantly fixed his attention.

"Holloa!" he exclaimed. "Why is it here? I thought it was for Hester."

Katharine laughed.

"He brought it this morning," she answered. "He's changed his mind, and has given it to uncle Robert. How do you like it?"

John looked at it long, his eyelids drooping a little. When he turned his head, he looked directly at Katharine's mouth critically.

"You haven't got a mouth like that," he said, suddenly. "And I never saw that expression in your eyes, either," he added, a moment later. "What's the fellow been doing?"

"I don't know, Jack. But I don't like it. I'm sure of that, at all events."

"Does uncle Robert like it?"

"No. He's anything but pleased, though he thought it splendid at first. Then he saw what you and I see. It wasn't so in the studio, it seems to me. He's done something to it since. Never mind the picture, Jack. Sit down, and let's talk, since we've got a chance at last."

John's eyes lingered on the portrait a moment longer, then he turned away with an impatient

movement, and sat down beside Katharine. He stroked her hand gently two or three times, and neither said anything. Then he leaned back in his straight chair and crossed one knee over the other.

"Somebody's trying to get me out of Beman's," he said, and his face darkened. "I wish I knew who it was."

"Trying to get you out of the bank?" repeated Katharine, in surprise. "Oh, Jack, you must be mistaken."

Jack laughed a little without smiling.

"There's no mistake," he said. "Mr. Beman as good as told me so this morning. We came near having a row."

"Tell me all about it," said Katharine, anxiously, and leaning forward in sympathy. "It's outrageous—whoever has done it."

"Yes, I'll tell you," said John. "It was this way. In the first place, I went to the Vanbrughs' last night, after all."

"But you said you weren't asked! I'd have gone, too—why didn't you send me word? At least—I'd have tried to go," she added, recollecting that she had spent the evening in her room.

"I found a note when I came up town. It was very informal, you know."

"Yes—they only asked me the day before," said Katharine. "It must have been very amusing. They were going to do all sorts of things."

"If you'd been there, I should have enjoyed it," answered John. "Yes, they did all sorts of things — improvised charades and tableaux — Crowdie was there, and Griggs, and the set. The best thing was a tableau of Francesca da Rimini. Hester was Francesca — you know her eyes. There they are!" he exclaimed, looking at the portrait. "And they made me do Paolo, and Griggs murdered me —"

"Fancy your acting in a tableau!" exclaimed Katharine.

"I never did before — but it was all improvised. Griggs looked awfully dangerous with a black beard and a dagger. Of course I couldn't see myself, but they said I was dark and thin and would do; so I did it, just to make the thing go. It was rather fun — but I kept watching the door to see if you weren't coming. Well — the end of it was that we stayed very late. You know what a fellow Vanbrugh is — he's a criminal lawyer, of all things — and he knows all kinds of people. There was an actor and any number of musical people, and that Russian pianist — what's his name? — Bezpodobny, or something like that. And we had supper, and then we got to smoking — two or three of the women stayed. You know Dolly Vanbrugh likes smoke, and so does Hester. I smoked some horrible Caporal cigarettes, and they gave me a headache. But I didn't drink anything —"

"I know, dear," said Katharine, softly.

No one knew better than she what he had done for her sake, and how faithfully he was keeping his word.

"Well — I got a headache, much worse than if I'd had a lot of champagne and things. I shall have to live on milk and water and barley sugar if I get much worse. I'm so nervous since — since I gave up all those things. But it will go off — I've asked Routh, and he says it's natural —"

"You didn't tell me," said Katharine, anxiously.
"Why didn't you?"

"Oh — why should I? He came to the house — he adores my mother, you know, dear old man — so I just asked him. Well — this morning I felt rather fuzzy in the head — woolly, don't you know. And of course I got up early, as usual, though it was awfully late when I got to bed. And then I saw no red ribbon in your window — and that put me into a bad temper, so that altogether I wasn't in the humour to be bothered much when I got to the bank. It happened that there wasn't much for me to do at first, and so I did it, and got it out of the way, and I sat doing nothing — just like this — look here!"

He rose, and went and sat down at the chair before the great writing-table, on the side away from Katharine. He planted his elbows on the big sheet of blotting paper, and bending down his

head, clasped his hands over his forehead in the attitude of a man whose head hurts him.

"Do you see?" he asked, looking up at Katherine. "My head really ached, and I'd nothing to do for a quarter of an hour, so it was quite natural."

"Of course! Why not? Do you have to sit up straight at the bank, like school-children?"

"Well — old Beman seemed to think so. He came loping along — he has a funny walk, you know — and I didn't see him. He doesn't often come out. So he'd stopped right in front of me before I knew he was there. I looked up suddenly when I heard him speak, and I jumped up. He asked what the matter was, and I told him I had a headache, which was rash, I suppose, considering my reputation. Then he asked me why I was doing nothing, and I told him I'd finished what had been given me and was waiting for more. He grunted in a displeased sort of way, and went off. Then my head hurt me worse than ever, and I put my hands up to my forehead again. In about five minutes, back comes old Beman, and wants to see me in his room. What do you think he said? 'An old and valued friend had warned him that I had intemperate habits.' That was a pleasant way of opening the interview. Then he went on to say that he had paid no attention to the old and valued friend's

warning, but that I was so evidently suffering from the effects of over-indulgence this morning that he felt it his duty to say that he could not tolerate dissipated idlers in his house — or words to that purpose — and that as he had already convinced himself by a previous trial — that was a year ago, you know — that I had no taste for work, he begged me to consider myself as free from any engagement on the first of next month — which struck me as unnecessary warning, considering that I get no salary. That's what happened."

"It's abominable!" cried Katharine. "It's outrageous! But you didn't take it quietly, like that, Jack? You said something?"

"Oh, yes — I said something — several things. I told him quite frankly about myself — how I'd been rather lively, but had given it all up months ago. It's awful, how a thing like that sticks to one, Katharine! He was virtuously civil — but I can't help liking old Beman, all the same. He didn't believe a word I said. So I told him to ask Ham Bright, who's their junior partner and is privileged to be believed. Unfortunately, Ham didn't go to the Vanbrughs' last night and couldn't have sworn to the facts. But that makes no difference. Of course, a year ago I'd have walked out of Beman's then and there, if he'd said such things to me, though I suppose they were true then, more or less. It's different now — a good

deal depends on it, and I mean to convince the old gentleman and stay. I don't want him to bring any tales—lies, especially—to uncle Robert, who got me in. But it's a wonder we didn't throttle each other in his office this morning. I take some credit to myself for having behaved so well. But I confess I should like to know who the 'old and valued friend' is. I'd like to be alone with him for a few moments."

"Yes," said Katharine, thoughtfully. "I wish I knew. Oh, Jack, what a shame!" she cried, with sudden vehemence. "When you've been trying so hard, and have succeeded so well! Oh — those are the sins people are burned everlasting-
ingly for — those mean, back-biting, busy-body sins, dressed up in virtue and friendship!"

"I hadn't thought about the everlasting side of it. I should be quite satisfied to see the individual burn for three-quarters of an hour here."

"Jack—" Katharine's face changed suddenly, as though something that shocked her had been forced upon her mind.

"Yes — what is it? Have you guessed who it is? Do you know anything about it? Tell me!"

"I think I know," she answered, in a low voice, as though horrorstruck by the discovery. "I'm not sure — oh, Jack! It's awful!"

"What's awful? Who do you think it is?"

"No — I won't tell you. I may be wrong, you

know, and one has no right to condemn people on a guess. But if it were—" She stopped.

" You mean your father?" asked Ralston.
" Don't you?"

Katharine was silent. She gave no sign of assent or dissent, but looked straight into John's eyes.

" Of course you do!" he exclaimed. " He was in the bank the day before yesterday. Don't you know? I told you I saw him. And he was alone with Mr. Beman in his room. I say — Katharine — if it is, you know — "

He did not complete the sentence, but his lower jaw went out viciously as his lips closed. Not knowing all that had passed between Katharine and her father, he had not suspected the latter at first. It was only when he remembered that he had told Katharine of his appearance at the bank, which she must remember, that he understood what she meant.

" I'm not sure, Jack," she said. " Don't imagine that I'm sure."

" All right — I'll ask Mr. Beman — "

" Don't!" cried Katharine, in sudden anxiety.

" Why not? He's got no right to conceal the name of a man who libels me. I shall tell him that I wish to be confronted with his informant, and that as a gentleman he's bound to give me the chance of justifying myself. Of course he'll say

that he can't send for Mr. Lauderdale to discuss a clerk's character. Then I think I'll take Ham Bright with me and go round to the Trust Company. It won't take a quarter of an hour."

"Of course you have a right to, Jack," said Katharine. "Only, I hope you won't do that. I'm not cowardly, you know, am I? But if you knew what it meant to live in a permanent tempest—"

"Has he been tormenting you again?" asked Ralston, quickly, and forgetting his own troubles at the mention of hers.

She would have told him everything, and it might have been better if she had. But he had frightened her on the previous day by threatening to insist on announcing their marriage if she were further troubled at home. She thought it wiser to turn back to the original point.

"If I were sure that it was papa who spoke to Mr. Beman, I could never be civil to him again," she said. "Can you imagine anything much worse? I can't. But you're quite right to try and stay at Beman's. It means a great deal to uncle Robert—your sticking to regular work, don't you see?"

"I don't know what will happen when he dies," said Ralston, thoughtfully. "Nobody else will ever do anything for me, when he's gone."

"No," answered Katharine, suppressing a smile

at the thought of what she knew, "nobody else will do anything. Let's hope that uncle Robert will live long enough to see you succeed. But do you know, Jack, I'm anxious about him. Of course Doctor Routh tells him he'll get quite well again, and I daresay he will, but I can't help feeling sometimes, when I'm with him —" she hesitated. "He's very old, you know," she added.

They talked for some time of the old gentleman's condition, and he would have been pleased, could he have heard them, at their genuine hope for his recovery. It would have balanced the sentiments of some other members of the family as he had described them to Katharine that morning. They had much to say to one another, and as there was no especial reason why John should go away, he stayed, overjoyed at his good fortune in being able to talk with her at last without the fear of interruption and of exciting attention, which beset them when they met at parties.

It was growing late, and the sunshine had turned red and was fading from the splendid old books on the east wall of the room, when the door opened and Leek appeared.

"Mr. Alexander Lauderdale wishes to speak with you, Miss Katharine," he said, and then glanced discreetly at Ralston.

It is necessary to say that Leek was almost as thoroughly acquainted with the state of the fam-

ily's affairs as any member of it, and that Alexander's dislike of John was perfectly well known to him.

Katharine stopped in the middle of a phrase, as though she had been struck. Ralston looked at the butler and then at Katharine, wondering what she would say. The library, constructed with a view to avoiding draughts, had only one door, which led into the hall, so that John could not go out without meeting Alexander. Katharine had not believed that her father would come to make trouble under his uncle's roof, but he was well acquainted with the old gentleman's habits, and knew that he would be resting at that hour. It was a difficult situation.

"I don't know what to do," said Katharine, in a low voice, helpless, at first. "I can't refuse to see him, since he knows I'm in. Can't you get out of the room, Jack?"

"There's no other door," answered Ralston, looking about. "Face it out. Let him come in!"

"I daren't — he'll make another scene —"

"Not before me — if he begins, I'll make him stop. You can't send him away," he lowered his voice to a whisper. "Imagine what that man would think, and what he'd tell the other servants. That settles it."

Leek stood motionless by the door during the colloquy, which he could not overhear, though he

knew exactly what the two were saying. Katharine hesitated a moment longer, and then gave the order.

"Ask my father to go into the drawing-room," she said. "I'll come in a moment."

Ralston laughed softly as Leek disappeared.

"What idiots we were — of course!" he said. "As though there were only one room. Look here, Katharine," he continued, taking her hand as she rose, "I could slip out while you're in there, but I'm not going to. I want to see you afterwards. I'll wait here."

"Do!" answered Katharine. "I shall feel better if I know you're here. Not that I'm frightened — but — you understand."

"Perfectly," answered Ralston, looking at her.

She left the room and he closed the door behind her. She found her father standing in the middle of the great drawing-room, in the evening light, holding his hat, and still wearing his thin black overcoat, as though he did not mean to stay long — an observation which reassured her. But his face was dark and angry and his lips looked dry and cold. She stood still at a little distance from him.

"Katharine, what is the meaning of this?" he asked, sternly. "Why are you here?"

"You know why I'm here, papa," answered Katharine, quietly, for she was determined, if possible, to avoid an angry altercation.

"I suppose you mean that you've come here because I locked you in your room this morning. I don't consider that a reason."

"I think you'll admit that you acted hastily," said Katharine. "Besides, have you any objection to my paying uncle Robert a visit? I've been here before in the same way, you know. You always seemed pleased. Won't you sit down?"

She was trying to be civil, but he was in no humour to court civility. He paid no attention to her invitation, but remained standing in the middle of the room.

"You understood perfectly well why I locked the door this morning," he said. "It's of no use to say that I acted hastily. I intended that you should feel my authority, and you shall. One of us two must be master. I'll not be browbeaten, and contradicted, and disobeyed by my own daughter, besides submitting to any language she chooses to apply to me."

"Do you propose to take me back by force?" asked Katharine, with a smile. "You know it's impossible. Or do you mean to argue with me? You won't convince me, and you ought to see that you can't."

"In other words, you've left your father's house without warning, and not meaning to come back," answered Alexander Junior, coldly.

"Not at all. I came here, with my mother's

consent, to make a visit. When you agree to treat me properly, I'll come back. I certainly won't stay where I'm liable to be locked up in my room by you at your discretion. It's not safe. You didn't even leave the key in the house, so that they might have brought me something to eat if I hadn't been able to get out."

"You did get out."

"By a mere chance. There happened to be a key which fitted the lock, or I might be there still."

"It's where you should be. How long is this state of war to last? Do you think I'll endure it much longer? You're mistaken."

"I don't see what you can do, if you won't treat me like a human being. Possibly you may get to the end of my patience, too."

"Do you mean to threaten me? Me!" Alexander's face darkened visibly, and he drew himself up to his full height.

"I don't know," answered Katharine, keeping her temper. "I might think it worth while to explain to uncle Robert, you know. I don't think that he'd be particularly pleased if he knew all you've done. I merely told him that it wasn't very peaceful in our house just now, as you wanted me to marry Mr. Wingfield, and I wouldn't. I've not told him anything else — but I might, you know. I'm likely to be with him most of the

day. I imagine you'd rather not offend uncle Robert."

Katharine was not prepared for the effect produced by this speech, which was diametrically opposite to the result she had expected. She had imagined that a reference to the will would act directly upon her father's love of money and make him cautious. Instead of this, however, he grew more angry.

"If you insult me in this way again, I shall certainly use force," he said, in a harsh way. "You're not of age, and I believe that the law can constrain you to obey me, and the police will act with the law. How do you dare to tell me that you can frighten uncle Robert into changing his will! You're going a little further than yesterday. I've warned you to be careful. It's your own fault if you go too far. The nearest Justice of the Peace will give me an order to remove you to your home in an hour. Don't exasperate me! Put on your things and come quietly with me. If you refuse, I'll act at once. You shall come. I say it, and I won't be disobeyed."

"And I won't be threatened," answered Katharine, with a rising intonation. "As for your getting any order to remove me, as you call it, I doubt whether you could. I rather think that uncle Robert is a much more powerful person than you are, and that your policemen would think twice

before trying to force their way into his house. Don't you think so yourself?"

Her anger was up, too, and her mother was not there to come between them. She forgot that the door of the drawing-room opened upon the same hall as the library, but that it was not closed except by a heavy curtain.

"And as for your saying that I've gone a little further than yesterday," she continued, her deep voice rising strong and clear in the big room, "you've gone further, too. You've been trying to hurt me by hurting the man I love. You've been to Mr. Beman, and you've told him that Jack is dissipated. Yes — I thought so — it was you who said it. You can't deny it."

"Certainly not!" exclaimed Alexander. "I was quite right to warn an old acquaintance against employing such a fellow. He's a discredit to the bank, he's a —"

"Stop, papa! I forbid you to say such things —"

Alexander's great voice suddenly broke out like thunder.

"You! You forbid me to say what I please! I say that John Ralston's a reprobate, a man not fit to be received in decent society, a low drunkard —"

"Oh! Is that what you say?" John Ralston

drew aside the curtain, and entered the room as he spoke.

Katharine turned pale, but her father was no coward. His steely eyes fixed themselves on John's face.

CHAPTER XII.

As Alexander Junior came towards him, John Ralston advanced from the door. Katharine placed herself between them, very much as her mother had come between her father and herself on the previous afternoon. But Ralston laid his hand gently on her arm, and drew her back.

"Please go into the library, Katharine," he said.

"No, no!" she cried, in answer. "I can't leave you together — so."

"Please go!" he repeated. "I'm angry — I must speak — I can't before you."

He pushed her with tender anxiety towards the door, and she felt his hand tremble on her arm. She yielded after a little hesitation, but paused as she reached the curtain, and looked back. John went on and faced Alexander, supposing that Katharine had left the room.

"So it was you who spoke to Mr. Beman about me," said Ralston, in a tone of menace.

"You're an eavesdropper, sir," answered Alexander Junior, with contempt.

"As you were shouting, and the door was open, I couldn't help hearing what you said, Mr. Lau-

derdale. I was anxious about Katharine, and had come into the hall."

"Then you've heard my opinion of you. You're not likely to change it by trying to browbeat me."

"I'm not browbeating you, as you call it. You've been saying things about me which are untrue. You've got to take them back."

Alexander Lauderdale drew himself up to his height, resting one clenched hand upon his hip. The other held his hat. He looked a dangerous adversary as he stood there, lean and steely, his firm face set like an angry mask, his broad shoulders square and black against the evening light.

"It occurs to me to ask how you propose to make me take back anything I've said," he answered.

Ralston looked at him quietly for several seconds, as a man looks who measures another's strength. Not that he had the slightest thought of violence, even then; but he was a born fighter as much as Alexander, if not more so. His instinct was always to strike rather than speak, in any quarrel. In a hand-to-hand encounter he would have been overmatched by the elder man, and he knew it. But that was not the reason why he lowered his voice and tried to speak more calmly, instead of growing hotter in altercation.

"You've done me a very great injustice, and

you've almost done me a serious injury — perhaps you really have, for Mr. Beman has turned me out," he said. "It's customary, I think, for people like us to repair such injuries as well as they can."

"You've injured yourself by your habits," answered Alexander. "I've a perfect right to say so. Don't contest it."

"It's contestable, at all events. I'm willing to admit that I've been what's called dissipated. More than most men, I daresay."

"That's undeniable, and that's precisely what I said, or words to the same effect."

"I think not. You were telling Katharine just now that I was a drunkard and a reprobate. I've not touched wine for months, and as for being a reprobate — it's a strong word, but rather vague. Since you've used it, please define what you mean by it."

"It's a general term of disapprobation which I applied to you because I think you're a bad character."

"Accusations of that sort have to be supported. You must go with me to Mr. Beman to-morrow, and repeat what you've said."

"Indeed? I shall do nothing of the kind."

"If Mr. Beman asks you to do it, you'll have to — at the risk of losing your character for truthfulness."

"Are you calling me a liar?" asked Alexander, and his voice rose angrily as he stepped forward.

"No," answered Ralston, calmly, but in a doubtful tone. "I'm not. But you've made an accusation, and if you fail to prove it, Mr. Beman will form his opinion about you. I formed mine long ago. I'm turning out to be right."

"I'm quite indifferent to your opinion," said Alexander, contemptuously. "And you're not in a position to influence that of lifelong friends like Mr. Beman. We'd better end this discussion at once. It can lead to nothing."

Katharine, who still stood by the door, her hand on the curtain, devoutly wished that in this, at least, John would follow her father's suggestion. She had a woman's instinctive fear of violence between men — a fear, strange to say, which has a fascination in it. If John had been inwardly as calm as he outwardly appeared to be, he would undoubtedly have seen that Alexander was right in this. But the insulting words which he had inevitably overheard rankled, as well they might, and against all probability of success, he still hoped that Alexander would make some acknowledgment of having been in the wrong. He thrust his hands into his pockets and made two or three steps, his head bent in thought. Then he turned upon his adversary suddenly again.

"Do you know — or don't you — that I've given up wine since last winter?" he enquired.

"I've heard it stated," answered Alexander. "I don't know it."

"Well — it's true. I tell you so now. I suppose you'll make no further difficulty about taking back what you said to Katharine just now — that I'm a drunkard?"

"If you have given up wine, you are certainly not a drunkard — at present. That's axiomatic." Alexander sneered.

"Will you remove the condition? I say that I have given up wine."

"I should hesitate to accept your unsupported evidence."

"In other words, you don't admit that I'm speaking the truth? Is that what you mean to say? Yes, or no."

"I don't accept your unsupported evidence," repeated Alexander, pleased with his own phrase.

"Do you know what you're saying? It's simply stating that I'm not to be believed. You can't put any other meaning upon your words."

"I don't wish to," answered Alexander, driven to stand by what he had said, but conscious that he had gone too far.

A pause followed. John was very pale. Alexander Lauderdale's face was dark with the blood that rose slowly under the grey olive skin. The hand that held his hat swung quickly by his side

once or twice. Ralston's fingers twitched nervously. By the door, Katharine held her breath.

"Look here, Mr. Lauderdale," said John, in a low voice. "I'm not going to strike you here, but when I meet you in the street I will."

"Jack! Jack!" cried Katharine, rushing forward and catching his arm, and throwing the other of her own round his neck.

She knew how much stronger her father was than he. At the sight of her, the deep red colour appeared at last in Alexander's face, and his anger got the better of him altogether.

"Take your arms from that man's neck!" he cried, furiously. "Don't touch him, I say!"

But Katharine did not release her hold. A woman's idea of protecting a man is to wind herself round him, so as to make him perfectly helpless to defend himself.

"Let me go, dear," said Ralston, in a voice suddenly tender, but trembling a little.

"Katharine! Go, I say!" The white of Alexander's eyes was bloodshot.

But Katharine tried to drag John back from him as he advanced.

"Go! Leave the room!" cried Alexander, roughly.

With a quick movement he seized her arm, almost where he had grasped it on the previous day, and he tried to pull her away from Ralston. His strong hand hurt her. At the same time Rals-

ton, not seeing how tightly Alexander held her, tried to disengage himself from her, as gently as he could. The struggle was not apparently violent, yet Katharine was exerting all her strength to cling to Ralston.

The floor, under the Persian rug, was highly polished. As Katharine stood, overbalanced in her strained position, the carpet slipped under her feet. With a short, half-suppressed cry, more of surprise than of fear, she relaxed her hands, fell sideways, and swung downward, her arm still in her father's iron grip. To tell the truth, he was trying to hold her up, though in reality he had thrown her down. Suddenly she uttered a piercing scream, and turned livid, as she fell upon the floor, and her father let go her arm.

At the same instant John Ralston struck Alexander Lauderdale a violent blow on the mouth, which sent the taller man staggering back two paces. It all happened in an instant. Alexander sprang forward again instinctively, and struck at John, who dodged the blow and closed with him. They were better matched at wrestling than with fists, for Ralston, though less strong by far, was the quicker, and had the advantage of youth. They swayed and twisted upon each other, the two lean, tough men, like tigers.

Katharine struggled to her feet. In getting up she tried to use her right hand, and uttered another

cry of pain, as her weight rested on it a moment in making the effort. It was quite powerless.

In a few seconds the room was full of people. Katharine's scream had echoed through the open door all over the house. The butler, the footmen, and the housemaids flocked in. The cry was heard even in Robert Lauderdale's bedroom, and he was not asleep.

The old man started, listened, and raised himself on his elbow, at the same time touching the bell by which he called his nurse. She had gone out upon the landing, to try and find out what was the matter, but ran back at the sound of the bell.

"What is it? What's happened?" asked old Lauderdale, and there was an unwonted colour in his face.

"I don't know, Mr. Lauderdale," answered the nurse, a calm, ugly, middle-aged woman from New England. "It was a woman's voice. Shall I go and ask?"

"No—no!" he cried, huskily. "It was my niece—help me up, Mrs. Deems—help me up. I'll go as I am."

He was clad in loose garments of white velvet—the only luxurious fancy of his old age. He got up on his feet, steadying himself by the nurse's arm.

"Let me ring for the men, Mr. Lauderdale," she said, rather anxiously.

"No, no! I can go so, if you'll help me a little—oh, God! The child must be hurt! Quick, Mrs. Deems—I can walk quicker than this—hold your arm a little higher, please. Yes—we shall get along nicely so—why didn't I have a lift in the house! I was always so strong! Quickly, Mrs. Deems—quickly."

When Robert Lauderdale entered the drawing-room, he saw a crowd of people gathering together round something which they hid from him.

"Go away! Go away!" he cried, in his hollow, broken voice.

The servants fell back at the voice of the master, only the butler remaining at hand. Katharine was lying back in a deep arm-chair, her broken arm resting upon a little table which had been hastily pushed to her side. John Ralston was bending over it, and looking at it rather helplessly, as pale as death. Opposite him, on Katharine's left, stood her father, his face still darkly flushed, his lips swollen and purple from Ralston's blow.

"Clear the room—and send for Doctor Routh," said old Lauderdale, turning his head a little towards Leek as he passed him.

"Yes, sir."

"I'm afraid it's broken," Ralston was saying, and his hands trembled violently as he softly passed them over Katharine's arm.

Mrs. Deems was already undoing the buttons of

the tight sleeve which chanced to be the fashion at that time. Robert Lauderdale pushed Alexander aside, and bent down over the chair, supporting himself with his hands.

"Katharine—little girl—you're hurt, dear," he said, as gently as his hoarseness would let him speak. "How did it happen?"

"It won't be anything," she said, in answer, shaking her head and trying to smile.

"How did it happen?" repeated the old man, standing up again, and steadyng himself, as he looked anxiously at Ralston.

But Ralston did not answer at once. Across the old gentleman's shoulder his eyes met Alexander's for an instant.

"Are you going to tell what you did, or shall I?" he asked, fiercely.

"What? What?" asked old Robert, in surprise. "What's this?" He looked from one to the other.

"Well—" Alexander began, "it's rather hard to explain—"

"You're mistaken," interrupted Ralston, promptly. "It's perfectly simple. You threw Katharine down, and she broke her arm."

"You—threw Katharine—down!" repeated the old man, the first words spoken in wonder, the last in wrath.

"Not at all, uncle Robert," protested Alexander.

"Do you suppose for a moment that I'm such a man as to — "

"I don't care what sort of man you are!" retorted Robert Lauderdale. "If you've laid hands on Katharine, you shall leave the house — for the last time. Tell me what happened, Jack — Katharine — both of you!"

"We quarrelled and didn't see Katharine," said John, his brown eyes on fire. "She thought we'd fight, and ran forward and held me round the neck to keep us apart. Her father dragged her away violently and she fell. Then I hit him."

"I didn't drag her violently — "

"Katharine — isn't that what happened?" asked Ralston.

Old Lauderdale bent down towards her again — but there was no need of looking into her eyes to find the truth there. Her only thought was for Ralston, and he was speaking the truth. She loved him as few women love. She had loved him through good and evil report, with all her soul. And she was ruthless of others, as loving women are. For his sake, she would have sent her father to the gallows, if he had done murder, and if the one word which might have saved him could have done Ralston the least hurt.

"It's exactly as Jack says," she answered, in clear tones. "He pulled me from Jack and threw me down."

Then the old man's wrath broke out like flame. But there was a little pause first. The blood rushed to his pale cheeks, his bony hands were clenched, and the old veins swelled to bursting in his throat and at his temples. The broken, harsh voice thundered and crashed as he cursed his nephew.

"God damn you, sir! Leave my house this instant!"

Alexander Lauderdale Junior had got his deserts and more also, and he knew it. But he stood still where he was.

"It's useless to argue with a man in your state—" he began.

"Are you going, you damned coward?" roared old Robert. "Ring the bell, Jack—send for the men—turn that brute out—"

He was beside himself with rage, but John glanced at Alexander, and then walked slowly towards the nearest bell. He was not inclined to spare the man who had injured Katharine. Perhaps most men in his position would have carried out the orders of the master of the house. Seeing that he was in the act to press the button, Alexander yielded. It was not at all probable that the millionaire's half dozen Englishmen would disobey their master, and Robert was capable at the present moment of having him literally kicked into the middle of the street. He had the temper that

ran through all the blood of the Lauderdale tribe, and it was up — the fierce, Lowland Scotch temper that is hard to rouse, and long controllable, but dangerous at the last. He had disliked and despised his nephew for years, but had not sought occasion against him. The occasion had come suddenly and by violence, and the wild beast in him was let loose.

Katharine's eyes followed her father's tall figure, as he stalked out of the room, with an odd expression. She was avenged for much in that moment.

"Brute!" growled Robert Lauderdale, as he disappeared behind the curtain.

"Infernal scoundrel!" answered Ralston, through his closed teeth.

"I'm so sorry I screamed, uncle Robert," said Katharine. "I waked you — "

Mrs. Deems interrupted her. She had ripped the seam of the tight sleeve, for she knew that it could not be drawn over the broken arm. On the white flesh there were two sets of marks — the one red, and evidently produced in the late struggle. The others were black and blue. They were side by side, the one set a little higher than the second. The arm was already much swollen. Mrs. Deems had listened in silence to what had been said, and her womanly heart had risen in sympathy for Katharine. She touched Robert Lauderdale's

sleeve, and pointed to the old marks on Katharine's arm, calling his attention to them.

"Those weren't made now, Mr. Lauderdale," she said, in a low, matter-of-fact tone.

"No — it was last night," said Katharine, rather faintly. "Jack, dear — get me a cup of tea. I don't feel well."

Ralston hurried away, saying something to himself which was not audible to the others, and which may as well be omitted here. The black and white of paper and ink make youth's blood seem too red. Old Lauderdale's anger was still at the boiling-point, and broke out again.

"Do you mean to say that he's been maltreating you, child?" he asked, his face reddening again. "If he has —"

"No — not exactly, uncle dear — I'll tell you — but — I'm a little faint. Don't worry."

She sighed and closed her eyes, as she finished speaking. She was in great pain now that the arm was swelling.

"Best not talk, Mr. Lauderdale," said Mrs. Deems. "I'll get some ice and napkins."

And she also left the room. The old man, alone with Katharine, bent over her with difficulty, and kissed her white forehead. His old head trembled as he raised himself again and looked shyly round, as though he had done something to be ashamed of. The young girl opened her eyes, smiled a little, and closed them again at once.

"Do you feel very ill, little girl?" asked Robert Lauderdale.

There was something pathetic in the evident attempt to make his unnatural, hollow voice sound gentle and kind, and he stroked her thick black hair with one bony hand, while the other rested on the back of the chair.

"Oh, no — it's nothing — only the pain in my arm. Don't be frightened, uncle Robert — I'm not going to die!"

She tried to laugh to reassure him. Then a sharp twinge from the broken limb drew her face. The expression of her suffering was instantly reflected in the old man's features, and his bushy white eyebrows bent themselves.

"Routh will be here in a minute," he said, as though reassuring her. "I've sent for him."

She nodded her thanks, but said nothing. Then with her left hand she found one of his, and pressed it affectionately. He lifted hers, and pressed his bearded lips to it softly.

"It will be the worse for him," he said, consoling her, as many men console women, with the promise of vengeance.

In his mouth the words might mean much. There are few things which a just man, justly angry, cannot accomplish against an offender, with the aid of eighty millions of working capital, so to say. Moreover, Robert Lauderdale was not dead

yet, and could so change his will, if he pleased, as to keep Alexander from ever receiving any share whatsoever of the great fortune.

But Katharine was avenged already, and wished no further evil to her father. She had seen him humiliated and driven from the house, and she had felt that he was not her father, but the man who had insulted and cruelly wronged John Ralston, her lawful husband. She had not seen the blow Ralston had struck, for at that moment she had just fallen to the floor. But all the rest had happened before her eyes, and she had neither spoken word nor made sign to spare him. So far, she had been utterly merciless.

Afterwards, she wondered how she could have been so utterly hard and unforgiving, and tried to remember what she had felt, but she found it impossible. It is hard to recall an old scald when one is floating in cool water. Not that she ever forgave her father for what he did and said during those twenty-four hours — that is, in the sense of forgiving entirely and thinking of him as though nothing had happened. That would have been impossible — perhaps it would have been scarcely human. The virtue that turns the other cheek to be smitten is in danger of having its head broken by the second buffet, for cowardice takes arms of charity. But they did not quarrel to the end of their natural lives, and it seemed strange to Kath-

arine, at a later period, that she should have looked on with a calm satisfaction that soothed her bodily pain while Robert Lauderdale ordered her father to be forcibly turned out of the house. But that is not strange, for humanity's hardest present problem is almost always the problem of yesterday, which is in black and white, rather than the expectation of to-morrow, confusedly shadowed upon the mist of what is not yet, by the light of the hope of what may be.

There was a sort of justice, too, in the fact that Robert Lauderdale, who had once quarrelled with John during the winter, should now be taking his side, and be forced to take it by every conviction of fairness. The only thing which Katharine could not understand was her father's own behaviour towards his uncle. It was in accordance with his temper that he should behave to her as he had behaved, and to John Ralston also. But it would have seemed more natural that he should have controlled himself, even by a great effort, rather than have risked offending the possessor of the fortune. On that afternoon he had seemed from the first to be braving the old man's anger. This was a mystery to Katharine. It seemed almost like premeditation. Yet she knew her father's limitations, and was sure that he was not able to form a deep scheme and carry it out, while mystifying every one who looked on. He was dull, he was

methodical, he was exact. He was also miserly, as she had lately discovered. But he was a man to keep a secret, rather than to produce one which should need keeping, and she almost suspected that he had lost his senses out of sheer anger, though she knew that he was able to control his temper longer than most men, when he pleased.

So far as the present was concerned, she felt, as she might well feel, that she was amply avenged, and when Robert Lauderdale seemed to be threatening further vengeance, she protested.

"Don't make it any worse, uncle Robert," she said, with an effort, for she was growing very faint. "But you must keep me here till I'm well, if you will. I can't go home to him now."

"Of course, child—of course! Should you like your mother to come and take care of you?"

"Oh, no—thank you—let me be with you. We'll be invalids together, you know." She smiled again, opening and closing her eyes. "Don't forget yourself, now," she continued. "You've had too much exertion—too much excitement—sit down and rest—here they come with the tea and things."

John and Mrs. Deems entered in close succession. John had insisted upon bringing the tea-tray himself, after overcoming Leek's objection with the greatest difficulty. But Leek appeared, nevertheless, playing footman to Ralston as butler,

so to say, and bearing a folding stand, which he set down beside Katharine. Mrs. Deems had a bowl of ice and a pile of napkins, with which she intended to cool Katharine's arm until Dr. Routh arrived.

"Beg pardon, sir," said Leek to the old gentleman. "The old brougham was just in with the bays, from exercise, William said, sir, so I sent him as he was for Doctor Routh, sir. I hope I did right, sir?"

"Quite right, Leek — very sensible of you," answered the old gentleman. "Just help me to a chair, will you? I'm a little stiff from standing so long. And get us some light. It's growing dark."

Leek and Ralston installed him in a comfortable chair on the other side of the tea-table. Mrs. Deems was packing Katharine's arm in ice. The young girl's face twitched nervously at first, but grew calmer as the cold began to overcome the inflammation.

Old Lauderdale watched the operation with interest and sympathy. No one but Mrs. Deems knew what Katharine must have suffered before she began to feel the effects of the ice. Ralston stood by in silence, looking at Katharine's face and ready to help if he were needed, which was far from probable. He was still pale, and the passions so furiously roused were still at work within him.

He could not help dreaming of his next meeting with Alexander Junior, wondering when it would take place and what would happen; but he had the deep and incomparable satisfaction of an angry man who has dealt his enemy one successful blow. There had been nothing wrong about that blow — it had gone straight from the shoulder, it had not been parried, and it had crushed the mouth he hated. And even afterwards, in the struggle that had followed, Alexander had not thrown him, in spite of size and weight in his favour — these had been matched by youth and quickness. The moment the two men had seen that Katharine was hurt, they had loosed their hold on one another and gone to her, just as the servants had rushed into the room. But John was not satisfied, as Katharine was. He had tasted blood, and he thirsted for more — to have his fight out, and win or be beaten without interference. He meant to win, and he knew he could make even defeat dangerous, for he was quick of his hands and feet, and tough.

Of the three, old Robert was the first to regain his equanimity. Of all the Lauderdale tempers, his was the least hard to rouse and the soonest to expend itself, and therefore the least dangerous. It was commonly said among them that Katharine Ralston, John's mother, who had hardly ever been seen angry, had the most deadly temper in the

family, though it was not easy to tell on what the tradition rested. John and Alexander had certainly not the best, and it was safe to predict that when they met again there would be war.

The old gentleman had made very unwonted exertions that afternoon, and before she had finished doing what she could for Katharine's arm, Mrs. Deems became anxious about him. His cheeks grew hollow, and as the blood sank away from them his face became almost ghastly. Ralston looked at him attentively and then glanced at the nurse. She nodded, and got a stimulant and gave it to him, and felt his pulse, and shook her head almost imperceptibly.

"How long is it since the doctor was sent for?" she asked of Ralston, in a low voice.

"It must be twenty minutes, I should think."

"Oh — longer than that, I'm sure!" exclaimed Katharine, whose suffering lengthened time.

"He'll be here presently, then," said Mrs. Deems, somewhat reassured. "How do you feel, Mr. Lauderdale? A little weak?"

"All right," growled the broken voice. "Take care of Katharine."

But he did not open his eyes, and spoke rather as though he were dreaming, than as if he were awake.

"Provided he's at home," said Ralston, half aloud and thinking of the doctor. "Hadn't we better send for some one else, too?"

He addressed the question to everybody, in a general way.

"Best wait till the carriage comes back," suggested Mrs. Deems.

This seemed sensible, and a silence followed which lasted some time. Ralston stood motionless beside the nurse. Katharine had swallowed some tea and lay quietly in her chair, while the skilful woman did her best with the ice and napkins. The old man's jaw had dropped a little, and he was breathing heavily, as though asleep. Mrs. Deems did not like the sound, for she glanced at him more and more uneasily.

"There, Miss Katharine," she said, at last, "that's the best we can do till the doctor comes. I think it's only the small bone that's broken, but I don't like to handle it. I guess it's better to leave it so till he comes. Best not try to move yourself."

Then she went round the table to old Lauderdale again, listened attentively to his breathing and felt his pulse.

"Are you asleep, Mr. Lauderdale?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

The jaw moved, and he spoke some unintelligible words.

"I can't hear what you say," said Mrs. Deems, bending down anxiously.

He cleared his throat, coughed a little and spoke louder.

"Take care of Katharine," he said, still without opening his eyes.

"Don't worry about me, uncle Robert," said Katharine, looking at him with anxiety.

Both she and Ralston turned enquiring glances to Mrs. Deems. She merely shook her head sadly and said nothing. Ralston beckoned to her to come and speak with him. She poured out another dose of the old man's stimulant and set it to his lips. He swallowed it rather eagerly and without difficulty. Then she glanced at Ralston and left the room. A moment later he followed her, and found her waiting for him on the other side of the curtain.

"You're very anxious, aren't you, Mrs. Deems?" he enquired, in a whisper.

"Well," she answered, "I suppose I am. I guess he's had a strain with this trouble. I do wish the doctor'd come, though. It's a long while since they went for him."

"Don't you think he's in danger now — that he might go off at any moment?" asked Ralston.

"Well — they do — with heart failure. That's the danger. But it's a strong family, Mr. Ralston, and he's been a strong man, old Mr. Lauderdale, though he's as weak as a babe now. You just can't tell, in these cases, and that's the fact."

There was a sound of wheels. A moment later Leek appeared.

"Doctor Routh can't be found, sir," he said. "They've been to his house and to two or three other places, but he can't be found, sir. So I've sent for Doctor Cheever. He's always on call, as they say in this country, sir."

"Quite right, Leek," answered Ralston.

He looked round for Mrs. Deems, but she had gone back into the drawing-room. She was evidently very anxious.

CHAPTER XIII.

ROBERT LAUDERDALE's condition was precarious, and Mrs. Deems was well aware of the fact as the minutes passed and neither of the doctors who had been sent for appeared. It was Doctor Routh's custom to come a few minutes before dinner time, as well as in the morning, and his visit at that hour was almost a certainty. As ill-luck would have it, Doctor Cheever was also out when the carriage reached his house, having been called away a few moments previously. Urgent messages were left for both, and the brougham returned empty a second time. So far as the old gentleman was concerned, Mrs. Deems knew well enough how to do what lay in her power, and she could do nothing more than she had done for Katharine already. But she knew how the least delay in setting a broken bone increased the difficulty and the pain when it came to be done at last, and her anxiety about Robert Lauderdale did not prevent her from feeling nervous about the young girl.

No one spoke in the great drawing-room where the old man and Katharine lay with closed eyes in their chairs, while the nurse and Ralston sat

watching them. But when Leek came with the news that Doctor Cheever could not be found, either, Mrs. Deems was roused almost to anger.

"You've got to get a surgeon, anyway," she said, sharply, to Ralston. "If you don't, they'll have a bad time when it comes to setting her arm. Mr. Lauderdale I can manage, perhaps, till the doctor comes, but I'm no bone-setter."

Ralston left the room, took the carriage, and went himself in search of a surgeon, and returned with one in less than a quarter of an hour. A few minutes later Doctor Routh appeared, and last of all came young Doctor Cheever. Then everything was done quickly and well. The three practitioners understood one another without words, and the machinery of the great house of the old millionaire did their bidding.

But Doctor Routh shook his head when he was alone with John Ralston half an hour later.

"I don't like the look of things," he said. "Of course, there's no telling about you Lauderdales. You're pretty strong people all round. I don't want any confidences. I don't want to know what's happened. I can see the results, and they're enough for me. You're a quarrelsome set, but you'd better have managed to fight somewhere else. I'm afraid you've killed him this time. However — there's no telling."

"How about Miss Lauderdale?" asked John, anxiously. "How long will she be laid up?"

"Oh — three or four weeks. But they must keep her quiet for a day or two, until the inflammation goes down. When the bone's begun to heal and the arm's immobilized, she can be about. It's no use your staying here. You can't see either of them. But if I were you — I don't say anything positive, I'm only giving you a hint — if I were you, I'd be at home this evening. If things get worse, I'll send for you."

"Are you going to stay yourself?" asked Ralston.

"Of course. Practically, as far as one can judge, your uncle's dying. You may just as well be here as any one else. He's very fond of you, in spite of your little tiff last winter. You're the only man in the family he'd like to see, and you won't be in the way."

It was his manner of putting it. At any other time Ralston would have smiled at the idea of being 'in the way' of death.

"I suppose there's really no hope," he answered, gravely. "But the only person he'd really wish to have with him is Miss Lauderdale."

"Well — that's impossible, my dear boy. She can't be running about the house in the middle of the night with her arm just broken. It might be dangerous."

"You'd better not let her know if anything happens, then — or she will."

John Ralston left the house very reluctantly at last, and returned to his home, feeling broken and helpless, as people who have nervous organizations do feel when they have been under great emotion and are left in anxiety. Naturally enough, Katharine's present condition was uppermost in his mind, and every step which took him further from her was an added pain. But a multitude of other considerations thrust themselves upon him at the same time, and he asked himself what was to happen on the morrow.

He had made up his mind, before Alexander Junior had left the house, that it was absolutely necessary to put an end to the present situation at once, and to declare his marriage without delay. He had never wished it to be kept a secret, and he had now the best of reasons for insisting that it should be made public. He might have been willing to believe that Katharine's fall had been an accident, and that her father had not meant to hurt her, but the fact remained that the accident had occurred through his brutal roughness, with the result that John had struck the elder man in the face. It was not safe for Katharine to stay any longer in her father's house.

On the other hand, it seemed clear that Robert Lauderdale was near his end. It was hardly to be hoped that he could survive the strain of his late fit of passion, weakened as he was and old. Even

Doctor Routh thought it improbable. What would happen if he died that night? If Katharine had to be moved, — she could scarcely stay in the house after the old man was dead, — to whose house should she go? John swore, inwardly, that she should not return to her father's. And he thought, too, of his next meeting with the latter. Society would be amazed and horrified to hear that they had actually come to blows. Society, especially in our country, detests the idea of personal violence. Its verdict is against any use of such means to settle difficulties. Society, therefore, must be kept in ignorance of what had happened. No one had seen the blow, not even Katharine, who had just fallen to the floor. She alone had seen John and her father struggling, for they had loosed their hold on seeing that she was hurt, and the servants had found them bending over her. Consequently, a great part of what had happened would be kept secret. Robert Lauderdale would not speak of it, and Mrs. Deems was bound to secrecy by her profession. John wondered how Alexander Junior would meet him, however, and whether there was to be any renewal of hostilities.

Altogether, when he let himself into his own house, he was in need of counsel and advice. There was no one but his mother to whom he cared to appeal for either. She had known all along of his devotion to Katharine Lauderdale, though she

knew nothing of the secret marriage. She knew how hard Katharine's life was made in the girl's own home, by her father's determined opposition to the match, and John had told her something of other matters — how old Robert had confided to Katharine what he meant to do with his money, and how her father had tried to force her to betray the confidence. Ralston was puzzled, too, by Alexander Junior's evident willingness to quarrel with his uncle, or at least by his determination to make no concessions whatever to him, and wondered whether his mother could not suggest some explanation.

Mrs. Ralston was, in some ways, very like her son, and the two understood one another perfectly. It would, perhaps, be more accurate to say that she had made him like herself, not intentionally, but by force of example, a result very unusual in the relations between mother and son. She was by no means a manlike woman, but she possessed many of the qualities which make the best men. She was fearless and truthful, and she was more than that — she had a man's sense of honour from a man's point of view, and admitted to herself that honour was the only religion in which she could believe. Like Katharine, she, the elder Katharine Lauderdale, had been brought up amidst contradictory influences, and had then married the Admiral, a brave officer, a man of considerable scientific

attainments, and a determined agnostic, of the school of thirty years ago, when many people believed that science was to bring about a sort of millennium within the next few years. In that direction she went further than her son. Her sense of fairness had shown her how unfair it would be to make an unbeliever of him before he was old enough to judge for himself, and in this idea she had made him go to church like other boys, and had persuaded his father not to talk atheism before him. The result had been to produce, more or less, the state of mind typical in these last years of the century, amongst a certain class of people who are collectively described as cultured, though they cannot always be spoken of individually as cultivated. John felt that he believed in something, but he had not the slightest idea what that something might be, and did not take the smallest trouble to find out. In this respect he differed from Katharine. Under very similar conditions, the young girl vacillated between a set of undefinable but much discussed beliefs, which included pseudo-Buddhism, Psychological Research, the wreck of what was for a few years Theosophy, and the latest discoveries in hypnotism, taken altogether and kneaded into an amorphous mass, on the one hand, while, on the other, she was attracted by the rigid forms of actual Christianity, widely opposed, but nearest in whole-heartedness,

which are found in the Presbyterian and the Roman Catholic churches. But John's mother was a peaceable agnostic, who had transferred the questions of right, wrong, and ultimate good before the tribunal of honour which held perpetual session in her heart.

She never discussed such points if she could avoid doing so, and if drawn into discussion against her will, she said frankly that she wished she might believe, but could not. In dealing with the world, her strength of character, her directness and her humanity stood her in good stead. In her heart's dealings with itself, she thought of Musset's famous lines—'If Heaven be void, then we offend no God. But if God is, let God be pitiful!' And she offended no one, nor desired to offend any. She had in life the advantage, the only one, perhaps, which the agnostic has over the believer—the safety of her own soul was not in the balance when the humanity of others appealed to her own. He who believes that he has a soul to save can be unselfish only with his bodily safety.

Mrs. Ralston was eminently a woman of the world in the best sense of an expression which many think can mean no good. She had never been beautiful and had never been vain, but she had much which attracts as beauty does, and holds as no beauty can. Of the Lauderdales now living, she was undeniably the most gifted. Katharine

might have rivalled her, had she developed under more favourable circumstances. But with the education she had received, good as it had been of its kind, it was not probable that the young girl would grow up into such a woman.

Yet Mrs. Ralston had no accomplishments, in the ordinary sense of the word. Her husband used to say that this was one of her chief attractions in his eyes — he hated women who played the piano, and sang little songs, and made little sketches, for the small price paid by cheap social admiration, and greedily accepted by the performer of such tricks. There were people who did such things well, and whose business it was to do them. Why should any one do them badly? Mrs. Ralston never attempted anything of the sort.

On the other hand, she was well acquainted with a number of modern languages, and knew enough of the classics not to talk about ‘reading Horace in the original Greek,’ which is as much knowledge in that direction, perhaps, as a woman needs, and as most men have occasion to use in daily life. She had read very widely, and her criticism, if not that of pure reason, was that of a clear judgment. She had found out early what most people never learn at all, that she could widen her experience of life vicariously by assimilating that of other people, in fact and even in fiction. Good fiction is very like reality. Bad fiction is generally made

up of fragments of reality unskilfully patched together. She picked out truths wherever she found them, and set them in their places in the body of all truth.

She was, in a way, the least American of all the Lauderdales. She herself would have said, on the contrary, from her own point of view, that she was the most really American in the tribe. She loved the country, she especially loved New York, and she loved her own people better than any other with which she was acquainted. This strong attachment to everything American was in itself contrary to the ideas of most persons with whom she was brought into close relations. What calls itself society, pre-eminently, and numbers itself by hundreds, and shuts itself off as much as possible, requiring those who would be counted with it to pass a special examination in the subjects about which it happens to be mad at the time — Society with a capital letter, in fact, is tired of work, it associates home with hard labour and a bad climate, and Europe with fine weather, idleness, and amusement. ‘They manage those things better in France,’ expresses New York society’s opinion of things in general apart from business. Mrs. Ralston differed from Society, and thought that many things were managed quite as well in America.

“That’s because you’ve been abroad so much, my dear,” said her friends. “Wait till you’ve

lived ten years at a stretch in New York. You'll think just as we do. You won't like it half so much. And besides — think of clothes and things!"

Now Mrs. Ralston did think of 'clothes and things.' She had never been beautiful, but she had in a high degree the strength and grace distinctive in many of the Lauderdales. She was tall, long-limbed, slight as a girl, at five and forty years of age, less strong than Katharine, perhaps, though that might be doubted, and certainly lighter and much thinner. She, too, was dark — a keen, strong face, like her son's, with the same bright brown eyes, and the same fine hair, though not nearly so black, but her face was kindlier than his, and far less sad. She had possessed the power of enjoying things for their own sake as long as Mrs. Lauderdale, Katharine's mother, who had kept her faculty of enjoying the world subjectively, with little interest in it for itself, but with the intensely strong attachment of easily satisfied personal vanity. The difference was, that the one form of enjoyment was doomed to destruction with the beauty which was its source, while the other increased with the ever broadening and deepening humanity in which it found its dominant interest. If Mrs. Lauderdale had been shut off from the gay side of social existence for a time, as Mrs. Ralston had been in the first years of her widowhood, she would have become sour and

discontented. Mrs. Ralston had seen where the real bitterness of life lay, and the bitterness had appealed to her heart almost as much as ever the sweetness had. She had suffered in some ways much, but not long; she had been disappointed more than once, but had been repaid.

Above all, she was her son's friend. She had lived a woman's life, and in him she was living a man's life, too. She had felt a mother's fears for him, a mother's sympathy in his failures, in his downheartedness, in the love for Katharine which had met with such bitter opposition. She had almost known a mother's despair in believing him lost and truly worthless, and when she had found out her mistake, a mother's triumph had made her heart beat fast. And little by little through the last months she had seen the man's real character coming to the surface in its strength and boldness, outgrowing the boyish weakness, the youthful faults that were not vices yet and never would be now, and it was as though the growth had been in her own heart, giving to herself new interest, new life, and new vitality.

And John Ralston had forgotten that one hour in which she had doubted him, though at the time he had found it hard to say that he ever should. She was his best friend and was becoming his closest companion. Even Katharine could not understand him so well, for she knew too little

of the world yet. She had given him her heart, and her sympathy was all his, but neither the one nor the other was yet quite grown.

John and his mother dined alone together that evening, and afterwards went upstairs and sat in a room which was called John's study, by courtesy, as it had been called the Admiral's study when his father was alive. It was a quiet, manlike room, with a small bookcase and a large gun-rack, huge chairs covered with brown leather, an unnecessarily large writing-table, a certain number of trophies of the chase, a well-worn carpet and curtains that smelled of cigars. Mrs. Ralston had been accustomed all her life to the smell of tobacco, and rather liked it than otherwise. She settled her graceful figure comfortably in one of the chairs, and Ralston sat down opposite to her in another and began to smoke.

"There's been a row, mother," he began. "I couldn't tell you before the servants, but I'm going to tell you all about it now. I want your advice and your help—all sorts of things of you. I'm rather worried."

"Do you think I couldn't see that in your face, Jack?" asked Mrs. Ralston, smiling as she met his eyes. "There's a certain line in your forehead that always comes when there's trouble. What is it, boy?"

John told his story briefly and accurately, with-

out superfluous comment, and as much of what had happened in Katharine's life as she had confided to him. He made it clear enough that she was being tormented to give up Robert Lauderdale's secret, and if he dwelt unduly upon any point, it was upon this. Mrs. Ralston listened attentively. When he came to the scene which had taken place on that afternoon, she leaned forward in her chair, breathless with interest.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried. "You always seem to be fighting somebody!"

"Yes—but wasn't I right, mother?" he asked, quickly. "What could I do? He acted like a madman, and he dragged Katharine from me and whirled her off upon the floor as though he'd been handling a man in a free fight. I couldn't stand that."

"No—of course you couldn't," answered Mrs. Ralston. "I don't see what you could have done but hit him, I'm sure. And yet it's a shocking affair—it is, really. I'm afraid it's cost uncle Robert his life, poor, dear old man!"

"Poor man!" echoed Ralston, thoughtfully. "Routh didn't seem to think he could live through the night. We may get word at any moment."

"The wonder is that he didn't die then and there. And there's no one with him, either—Katharine laid up in her room—why didn't you stay in the house, Jack?"

"Routh wouldn't let me. He's there. He told me I should only be in the way and that he'd send for me, if anything happened. It's an odd thing, mother — but there's no one to go to uncle Robert but you and I and cousin Emma. He'd have a fit if he saw cousin Alexander. And of course the old gentleman can't go." He meant Robert's brother.

"No — of course not."

A short silence followed, and Mrs. Ralston seemed to be thinking over the situation.

"Well, Jack," she said, at last, "what are we going to do? This state of things can't go on."

"No. It can't. It shan't. And I won't let it. Mother — you know we talked last winter — you said that if ever I wanted to marry Katharine — wanted to! Well — that we could manage to live here — "

It would be hard to give any adequate idea of the reluctance with which John approached the subject. Short of the consideration of Katharine's personal safety, which he believed to be endangered by the life she was made to lead, nothing could have induced him to think of laying the burden of his married life upon his mother's comparatively slender fortune. Although half of it was his, for she had made it over to him by a deed during the previous winter, out of a conviction that he should feel himself to be independent, yet he had never

quite accepted the position, and still regarded all there was as being, morally speaking, her property. But now she met him more than half way.

"Jack," she said, almost authoritatively, "if Katharine will marry you, marry her to-morrow and bring her here."

"Thank you, mother," he answered, and was silent for a moment.

"We can live perfectly well—just as well as we do now. One person more—what difference does it make?"

"It would make a difference—more than you think," answered John. "But there's another thing about it, mother—there's a secret I've kept from you for a long time. I must tell you now. You must be the first to know it. But I want to ask you first not to judge what I've done until I've told you all about it."

"Is it anything bad, Jack?" asked Mrs. Ralston, with quick anxiety, bending far forward in her chair, while all her expression changed.

"No, mother—don't be frightened. It's this. Katharine and I were married last winter."

"Married!" cried Mrs. Ralston, in amazement. "Married!" she repeated in a tone which showed that she was deeply hurt. "And you did not tell me!"

She said nothing more for a few moments, and John was silent, too, giving her time to recover

from her astonishment. She was the first to speak.

"Either Katharine made you marry her, or you must have had some very good reason for doing such a thing, Jack," she said. "It's not like you to get married secretly. When was it?"

"It was on that day when I was so unlucky. When I lost my way, and everybody thought I'd been drinking."

"Jack! Do you mean to say that you had that on your mind, too? Oh, Jack dear, why didn't you tell me?"

"In the first place, I'd said I wouldn't. The reasons seemed good then. They haven't seemed so good since. I'll tell you the idea in two words. We were to be privately married. Then we were to confide in uncle Robert, expecting that he would find me something to do, that I could do whatever he proposed well enough to earn a living without accepting money as a gift. There was where the disappointment came. I found out afterwards how true what he said was. Everybody's on the lookout for a congenial occupation that means living out of doors and enjoying oneself. He said there was nothing to be done but to go back to Beman's and work at a desk for a year. Then he'd push me on. He tried to make me take a lot of money, but I wouldn't. I'm glad of that, anyhow. So we've never said any-

thing about it, except to him. But now something must be done."

"But you could have brought her here any time in these four months — at least, you might have told me and I would have helped you."

"I know — but then, it would have been a burden on you, as it's going to be now."

"A burden! Don't say such things."

"Only that now — well — I don't like to say it, but dear old uncle Robert isn't going to live long, and then you'll be rich, compared to what you are now, even if he only leaves you what he'd think a small legacy."

"Yes — that's true," answered Mrs. Ralston, thoughtfully. "Isn't life strange, Jack?" she continued, after a short pause. "We're both very fond of him. We shall miss him very much more than we realize. I think either you or I would do anything we could, and risk anything, to save his life — and yet we can't help counting on the money he's sure to leave us when he dies. I suppose most people would call it heartless to speak about it, though they'd think about it from morning till night. But I don't think we're heartless, do you?"

"No," answered John, "I don't. Not that it would be a crime if we were. People are born so, or they aren't. We can't all be rough plastered with goodness and stuccoed with virtue on top of

it. We're natural, that's all—and the majority of people aren't. I don't wish uncle Robert to die, any more than you do, or than any one does, except cousin Alexander. It's only reasonable for us who are young to think of what we may do when he's gone, since he's so old."

"Yes, I suppose so," assented Mrs. Ralston. "So you've been married all these months! It hurts me a little to think that you shouldn't have told me. I'd have helped you. I'm sure I could have made it easier. But I see—you were afraid that I should have to go without my toilet water and have to wear ready made gloves, or some such ridiculous thing as that! Married! Well—I'm not exactly sentimental, but I'd rather looked forward to your wedding with Katharine. I always knew you'd marry her in the end, and I liked to think of it. I'm glad, though—I'm glad it's done and can't be undone, in spite of her father. Tell me all about it, since you've told me everything else."

It was not a long story—how Katharine had persuaded him, much against his will, how he had found a clergyman willing to perform the ceremony, and how Katharine and he had gone to the church early in the morning.

"And now she is Katharine Ralston, too, like me—and I've got a daughter-in-law!" Mrs. Ralston smiled dreamily.

After the first moment of surprise and after the first sharp pain she had felt for her son's want of confidence in her, as she regarded his secrecy, the news did not seem to disturb her much. For years she had been convinced that Katharine was destined to be her son's wife, and for many months she had felt sure that, with his nature, his happiness and success in life depended entirely upon his marrying her. She was heartily glad that it had come, though, as she said, she had often looked forward to the wedding as to something very bright in her own existence.

"Jack," she said, "leave it to me to set matters straight with the rest of the family, will you?"

"Why — mother — if you think you can — of course," answered Ralston, with some hesitation. "The difficulty will be with cousin Alexander. We're enemies for life, now."

"Yes. Until to-day you were only enemies by circumstance. You'll never be reconciled, now — not completely. You could never spend a night under his roof after what has happened, could you? Of course you can say to him that you acted under the impression that he was — well — what shall I say? — that he was treating Katharine brutally, but that if he wasn't, you apologize for striking him. But after all, that's only quibbling with honour. It wouldn't satisfy him and wouldn't be very dignified for you, it seems to me. And he's

not the man who would ever put out his hand and forgive you frankly and say that by-gones should be by-gones."

"Scarcely!" assented Ralston. "Not at all that kind of man. By the bye, mother, — forgive me for going off to something else, — what do you think is the reason why he seems so ready to offend uncle Robert, instead of bowing down to him, as they all do? He wants the money more than any one. He can't suppose that if uncle Robert were to make a new will now, after what has happened, he'd leave him anything. You should have heard the old gentleman swear at him, and turn him out of the house!"

"I don't know," answered Mrs. Ralston, thoughtfully, "unless he wants to irritate uncle Robert, and drive him into making some extraordinary will that wouldn't hold. Then he'd get it broken. You see, Jack, my uncle Alexander, who's uncle Robert's own brother, and I, who am the only child of uncle Robert's other brother, are the next of kin. If there were no will, or if the will were broken, we two should get the whole fortune, equally divided, half and half, and none of the rest would get anything. Mr. Brett told me that a long time ago. As it is, we don't know how the money's left, though uncle Robert has often told me that I should have a big share."

"Katharine knows," said John. "That's the reason her father leaves her no peace."

"And she's not told you, Jack?"

"Mother! Do you suppose Katharine would betray a confidence like that? You don't know her!"

"No, dear. I didn't seriously think she would. But then — she's your wife, Jack. She might tell you what she wouldn't tell any one else, and yet not think that she were giving away a secret. Most women would, I think."

"Katharine's not like most women," said Ralston, gravely.

A silence followed, during which his mother watched his face, and her own grew beautiful with mother's pride in man, and woman's gladness for woman's dignity.

When Ralston and his mother separated, they had come to a clear understanding about the future. They had decided to say nothing about the marriage until Katharine had recovered sufficiently to leave Robert Lauderdale's home, and then to establish her in their house, and tell the world that there had been a private wedding. If the old gentleman died, — and they were obliged to take this probability into consideration, — Katharine would have to be brought at once. If anything, this would make matters simpler. The household would be in mourning, Katharine would be unable to go out or to appear at all for some time, and society would easily believe that during the two or three weeks which must pass in this way, the marriage might have taken place.

CHAPTER XIV.

No one slept much during the early part of the night in the millionaire's home. Katharine lay long awake, prevented from sleeping partly by the painful numbness in her bandaged arm, and partly by the ever recurring picture of the day's doings which came back to her unceasingly in the stillness. Just as the picture was growing shadowy and dreamlike, some slight sound would break it and recall her to herself,—a distant foot-fall on the stairs, the opening and shutting of a door near her own, or even the occasional roll of a belated carriage in the street.

There was a soft light in the sick man's room. The white walls and hangings took up and distributed the whiteness, so that even the remotest corners were not dark. Robert Lauderdale lay in his bed, breathing softly, his eyes not quite closed, and his bony hands lying like knotty twigs upon the white Shetland wool that covered his body. For they were like wood or stone, yellowish in colour, rough in shape, and yet oddly polished by time, as some old men's hands are. His snowy beard and hair, too, were almost sandy again, as they

had been in youth, by contrast with the delicate linen and the snow-white, sheeny material that was everywhere.

He was not sleeping with his eyes open, as dying persons sometimes sleep a whole day. Nor was his mind wandering. Doctor Routh could see that well enough, as he sat there hour after hour, watching his old friend. The doctor wished that he might really fall asleep, and let his weary old heart gather strength to live a little longer. But even Routh was giving up hope. The machine was running down, and the game was played out. There was not one chance in a hundred that Robert Lauderdale could live another twelve hours. From time to time the doctor gave him a little stimulant, but the failing heart reacted less and less.

Between three and four o'clock in the morning, the old man turned his head slowly on the pillow, and his sunken eyes met Routh's in a long look—the look which those who have watched by the dying know very well.

"Routh," said the hoarse voice, with solemn slowness, "I'm going to give up the ghost."

Still for a few seconds the deep, mysterious, wondering look continued in the hollow eyes. Then he turned his head slowly back to the original position. The words struck the doctor as singular. He did not remember that he had ever heard a patient use just that phrase, though so many

persons when near the point of death give warning of their end in some such expression.

"You're not going yet," the doctor answered, mechanically, and he held a glass to the old man's lips.

"I don't want any false hope. I know it's coming," answered the dying man, speaking against the rim of the little tumbler.

Routh stood up to his vast height, and then his nervous, emaciated frame bent like a birch sapling in a gale as he leaned over the bed, and listened to the fluttering beats of the heart that had almost done its work.

"Shall I call anybody?" he asked. "Is there anything you want done?"

"How long do you think it will be?" asked Robert Lauderdale, trying to speak more rapidly.

"Half an hour, perhaps," answered Routh.

In their voices there was that indescribable tone with which the words of brave men are uttered in the face of death. No one who has ever heard it can forget it.

"I'd like to say good-bye to Katharine." He paused and drew breath heavily. "Will it hurt her?" he asked, presently.

"No," answered the doctor, seeing the look of anxiety which accompanied the question.

A broken arm seemed a very slight matter to Routh, compared with the wish of his old friend.

He did not hesitate, but touched the bell for Mrs. Deems, who appeared at the door.

"He wishes to see Miss Lauderdale," he whispered. "You must help her to wrap herself up, and bring her here."

Mrs. Deems nodded, and looked at the doctor with the grave glance of enquiry which means the one question, 'Life or death?' And Routh answered with the other glance, which means 'Death.' Mrs. Deems nodded again, and left the room. Routh returned to the bedside.

"When she comes — leave us alone — please," said the sick man.

There was silence again for a few minutes. Again the lids were half closed, and the old eyes stared out beneath them into the soft whiteness, and perhaps beyond. But the beard moved a little from time to time, as though the lips were framing words, and Routh knew that the end was near.

Then Katharine came, waxen pale, her raven hair coiled loosely upon her shapely head, her creamy throat collarless, her left arm and hand free, the rest of her wrapped and draped in soft, dark things. She, too, looked up into Routh's face with the glance of the question, 'Life or death?' And again the answer was, 'Death.'

But Mrs. Deems had told her. Her eyes said that she knew, and her face told that she felt. Robert Lauderdale's great head turned again,

slowly and painfully, towards her. She bent down to him, and the doctor left the room, taking the nurse with him. He did not quite close the door. He could almost hear, beforehand, the low cry the young girl would utter when the end came.

Katharine bent down and laid her hand softly upon the old man's brow.

"Uncle dear — you're not going," she said. "You'll get well, after all."

"I'm going to give up the ghost," he said, as he had said to Doctor Routh.

"No — no —" But she could not find anything to say, so she smoothed his forehead.

She had never seen any one die, but she was not afraid. That is a matter of temperament, and neither man nor woman should be blamed who can not bear to feel a soul parting and see a body left behind. Katharine felt only that she would keep him if she could. She knelt down and took one of his hands, his left. It was cold and hard to touch, with little warmth in it, like that of a statue in a garden when the sun has gone down.

"I want to say good-bye," said the hoarse voice, just above a whisper.

"Yes — I'm here," answered Katharine, and there was silence again, while she gently caressed the cold hand.

"Routh said half an hour."

The mysterious, dying eyes wandered a little,

and then sought the white clock on the mantelpiece.

"Can't see — what time it is," said the rough whisper.

"Twenty minutes to four," answered Katharine, glancing round quickly, and then looking again at his face.

"Poor child — little girl — ought to be in bed." The words came indistinctly, and the breathing grew more heavy.

Then the beard moved with unspoken words, and Katharine watched, hearing nothing. She had been a little confused at first, but now she recollected that she should ask if there were anything she could do. She could not tell whence the recollection came. She had perhaps got it from a book read long ago. He might want something. He might die unsatisfied. She made anxious haste to ask the question.

"Is there anything I can do? Any one else you want, uncle?" she enquired, speaking close to his ear.

The breathing, almost stertorous now, ceased for an instant. He seemed to be trying to collect strength to say something.

"Your father — tell him from me — bear no malice —" He could get no further.

"Yes — yes — don't think about it — don't distress yourself," said Katharine, quickly. "I'll tell him."

Again the heavy breathing blew the stiff white hairs of his beard and moustache, as his chin, raised in the effort of speaking, fell suddenly to his breast again. The breath raised the coarse white and sandy hairs and blew them to right and left. The eyelids drooped. Katharine wondered whether old men always died like that. Then the thought that he was really dying put on its reality for the first time, and struck her suddenly in the heart, and the pain she felt struck back instantly into her helpless, bandaged arm.

"Is it God?" asked the dying man, suddenly, in a louder voice and quite clearly.

Again, in the effort, his chin rose and fell. There was something awful in the question, asked with the strength of the death struggle. Then came more words, indistinct and broken.

"I shall be — a little boy again." So much Katharine understood of what she heard.

Her tears gathered. Some of them fell upon the yellow, branch-like hand. Then she bent close to his ear again.

"There is God," she said. "God will take you, dear — He is taking you now. Think of Him. You're dying."

Her tears broke her voice, as raindrops break the sighing of the breeze in summer. She wept, though she would not, and her pale face was wet. And his heavy breath filled her ears till it seemed

to roar like a furnace — the furnace of life burning itself out, where all was still and white. She said prayers that took meaning in her heart and lost it as they passed her lips, meeting the great doubt on the threshold of her soul. She did not know what she said. It was not much, nor eloquent.

“I believe — God —” Then a great sigh blew the white hairs to right and left.

The breathing grew more slow, longer, harder, a great breathing of sighs. Death had life by the throat. In awe, the girl looked into the ancient face, and the stream of tears trickled and ran dry. Once more the voice burst out, articulate but rattling.

“Domine — quo — vadis?”

The great head was raised, and the mysterious eyes were wide, gazing at her, waiting upon the answer, waiting to die. She remembered the answer.

“Tendit ad astra.”

He heard it, and died.

Katharine had never seen death, but she knew him, as we all know him. Twice, thrice, the broad chest heaved under the soft, feathery woollen, and the after-breath of the storm quivered in the frost of his beard. But the girl knew he was dead. Then came her low, trembling cry, the echo of death’s voice from living heartstrings.

It was not a great sorrow, though Katharine had been very fond of the old man and was very grateful to him, as well she might be. She was, perhaps, as closely attached to him as is possible in such a relationship between the very young and the very old. But although her tears flowed plentifully, it was not one of those deep-gripped wrenches that twist the heart and leave it shapeless and bruised for a time — or forever. Hearts, too, are less often broken by those who go than by those who stay with us. The young girl's grief was sincere, and hurt her, but it was not profound. They led her away, and when the door of her own room closed behind her, the tears were already drying on her cheeks.

Death brings confusion and leaves it in his path. Many hours passed before there was quiet in the great house, but Katharine slept, exhausted at last by all she had endured that day, beyond the possibility of being kept awake by mere bodily pain. Late in the morning her mother came to her bedside. Katharine had been awake a quarter of an hour, and had been hesitating as to whether she should ring or not. Her arm hurt her, and the hand that had been so white was purple against the tight white bandages. She longed to tear them off and have rest, if only for a moment.

“Poor uncle Robert!” said Mrs. Lauderdale, seating herself, after kissing the young girl’s forehead.

She was a little pale with natural excitement, and she was certainly not looking her best in a black frock which was far from new, but which had to do duty until she could have mourning made. Katharine said nothing in answer, but nodded her head on the pillow. She wondered whether her mother knew that she had broken her arm. But in this she did her an injustice.

"Was your wrist much hurt?" asked Mrs. Lauderdale, almost immediately.

Then she caught sight of the splints and bandages and the purple fingers, as Katharine lifted the coverlet a little. Instantly her face changed.

"Heavens, child! What have you done to yourself?" she cried, springing to her feet and bending over to look.

"Papa broke my arm," answered Katharine, quietly.

"Your father — broke your arm?" Mrs. Lauderdale spoke with the utmost astonishment, mingled with disbelief.

"Why, yes. Didn't you know? It was last night — that — all the confusion and trouble have killed poor uncle Robert. Didn't papa tell you anything?" Katharine stared at her mother.

"He came home and said he had hurt his mouth. I could not get him to say what had happened to him. To tell the truth, I was rather worried. It's so unlike him to hurt himself, or have any

accident. He said it was a ridiculous affair, and that he didn't choose to be laughed at, and begged me to say nothing more about it. You know how he is. But he never mentioned you."

Katharine said nothing for a few moments. She wondered how wise it might turn to be to tell her mother all that had happened. But the instinct of child to mother overcame hesitation. Her mother had begun to take her part again, and the broken sympathy was being restored by bits and pieces, as it were.

"There was a terrible scene yesterday afternoon — late," said Katharine. "He came here, and Jack was with me in the library."

"Jack! Oh, Katharine! I wish you wouldn't see him in this way — "

"It's no use wishing, mother," answered the young girl. "I made up my mind long ago. Well, Jack was with me in the library, when Leek came in and said that papa was here. I saw him in the drawing-room, so that they shouldn't meet. I forget all he said. The usual thing, about being disobedient and undutiful. He was awfully angry because I got out yesterday morning. So I just went over one or two of the things he had done to hurt me. By the bye — I ought to say, that just before he came Jack had been telling me that some one had been to Mr. Beman, and had said that Jack drank, and was dissipated, and was

altogether rather a good-for-nothing. And Mr. Beman had seen Jack the next day, doing nothing, because he had nothing to do just then, and with his head in his hand. So Mr. Beman took it into his foolish old head that Jack had been drinking, and told him to go at the end of the month. Now I knew it must be papa who had spoken, so I accused him of it, and he admitted that it was true, and began abusing Jack like a pick-pocket, at the top of his lungs. Jack heard what he said, for the door was open, and I don't blame him for coming in. They threatened each other, and got so angry, and I thought they'd kill each other, so, like a silly idiot as I was, I threw my arms round Jack's neck as though I meant to protect him. Papa's so much bigger, you know. Well, he — papa, I mean — lost his head and got me by the arm. He's horribly strong. He got me by the right arm a little above the wrist, and threw me half across the room, and when I tried to help myself up — ”

“ Do you mean to say that he threw you down? ” cried Mrs. Lauderdale, really horrified.

“ Yes — of course! With all his might, half across the room, so that I rolled on the floor. Well, when I tried to get up, my arm was broken, and Jack was wrestling with papa. I couldn't help screaming when I fell, and that roused the house, first the servants, and then uncle Robert, in those queer white velvet clothes he wears — ”

don't you know? Jack told what had happened, and uncle Robert was furious and ordered papa to leave the house — he swore awfully — I never saw him so angry. So papa went. But it was the rage, I suppose, and the exertion — they used up all the dear old man's strength — ”

She stopped speaking suddenly as her thoughts went back to the dead man, and her expression changed. Her eyes filled very slowly with tears, that would not quite brim over, but dimmed her sight. When she turned her head again, she saw that her mother had hidden her face in her hands upon the edge of the bed. Katharine did not understand. A convulsive sob shook the shapely shoulders, and the golden hair trembled.

“ Mother dear — don't cry so! ” said Katharine, putting out her left hand and touching the fair head with a caress. “ I know — you were very fond of him — of course — ”

Mrs. Lauderdale looked up suddenly with streaming eyes and a face drawn in pain. She shook her head slowly.

“ It's not that, child — it's not that! It's the other — ”

“ About me, dearest? ” asked Katharine. “ Don't cry about me. I'm all right. It hurts a little now, but it will soon be over.”

“ No — child — you — you don't understand! ” answered Mrs. Lauderdale, with trembling lips.

A passionate burst of weeping hindered her from saying more. Katharine tried to soothe her with voice and hand, but it was of no use. Then she just let her hand rest there, touching her mother's cheek, and lay quite still, waiting till the storm should pass. It lasted long, for in the midst of her sorrow and indignation there was the acute consciousness of the part she herself had borne in all that had happened.

"It's my fault, it's all my fault!" she sobbed, at last.

"No, mother — why? I don't understand! Try and tell me what you mean."

Little by little the sobs subsided and Mrs. Lauderdale dried her eyes. Katharine really did not at all understand what was taking place. She thought her mother must be hysterical. Dark women rarely understand the moods of fair ones.

"You don't know how dreadful it seems to me," said Mrs. Lauderdale, as she grew calmer. "It seems — somehow — awful! There's no other word. Your father treating you in such a way — and fighting with Jack! But it isn't only that — it's deeper. I've done very wrong myself. I've been very bad — much worse than you know — "

"You, bad? Oh, mother! You're losing your head! Don't say such absurd things. You — well, you did go against Jack and me rather suddenly

last winter, and I couldn't quite forgive you at the time. But it's going to be all right now."

Mrs. Lauderdale's face grew pale again. For a few moments she said nothing, and once or twice she bit her lip.

"I'm going to tell you what it was," she said, with a sudden impulse — unwise, perhaps, but generous and even noble in its way. "I envied you, dear. That's why I behaved as I did."

"Envied me? Envied — me?" Katharine repeated the words slowly and with a wondering emphasis. "Why? What for?"

Mrs. Lauderdale stared at her a moment in surprise at not being understood immediately.

"What for?" she repeated. "For your beauty — because you're young. Don't you know how beautiful you are?"

Katharine stared in her turn, in genuine astonishment. The idea that her mother could envy her had never crossed her mind.

"Yes — but —" she hesitated, and the rich young blood rose slowly under her white skin. "I know — at least —" she stammered, "people sometimes tell me I'm good-looking, of course. But — but the idea — of your envying — me! Why — it never occurred to me!"

"It's true," said Mrs. Lauderdale, looking down and pulling at the lace on the pillow, with a regretful smile.

"Oh, I don't believe it!" cried Katharine, suddenly. "It's impossible—you may have thought you did, once—"

"No, it's true," answered Mrs. Lauderdale, and the smile faded and was lost in the contrite expression which came into her face.

She had made her confession and wished to go to the end of it. She was trying to make a reparation, being a good woman, and she found it hard, especially as her daughter did not half understand what she meant.

"I'm losing my beauty, Katharine," she said, and every word of the acknowledgment cut her. "It's going, day by day, little by little. You don't know—it's as though my life-blood were being drained—it's worse—sometimes. I'd rather die than grow old and faded. You see, it's all I had. I know now how much I've cared for it—now that it's so hopeless to try and get it back. And one evening last winter—Crowdie was there—he kept looking at you while I was talking to him, and then I caught sight of my face in the little glass that hangs from the mantel-shelf. I shan't forget how I looked. I knew then."

Her face grew suddenly weary and half-desperate now, as she told the little story of the hardest moment in her life. Katharine listened in wondering silence, knowing that she was learning one of the secrets of the human heart. Mrs. Launder-

dale paused a moment, and shivered a little, perhaps with the last after-sob of her convulsive weeping.

"Yes—I knew then," she continued, in a low voice and still looking down. "I knew how much it had all meant. And I began to hate you. Don't be horrified, child. I loved you just as much, but I hated you, too. How funny that sounds! But I can't say it any other way. It wasn't you I hated—at least it wasn't the same you that I loved. It was your face, and your freshness, and your youth—and that walk of yours. I wanted you to be all covered up, so that no one could see you—then I should have loved you just as much and in just the same way as ever. Do you understand? I want you to understand. You must, or I shall never be a happy woman again. What I suffered! So I made you suffer, too. Do you know what I thought? You must know everything now. I thought that if I could separate you and Jack and make you marry some one else—since you couldn't marry him—why, then you'd have been away somewhere else, and I could feel again that I was quite beautiful. Only for a month—one month! If I could only have that feeling of being perfectly beautiful again—just for one month."

She bowed her head again and hid her face in the pillow, for she was blushing with shame—the

good red shame that honest blood brings from a sinful heart. The sight of the blush pained Katharine far more than the thought of what caused it.

"Mother dear—" she stroked the golden hair—"it's all over now. What does it matter? You don't hate me now!"

"Hate you! Ah, Katharine—I never hated you without loving you just as much. I never said those hateful things but what the loving ones fought them and came out when I was all alone. The moment you were gone, it was all different. The moment I didn't have to look at you—and think of myself, and the little wrinkles. Oh, the vile, horrid little wrinkles—what they've cost me! And what they've made me do! And they're growing deeper—to punish me—pity me, dear, if you can't forgive me—"

"Ah—don't talk like that! I never guessed it, and now—why, I shall never think of it again. Unless I have a daughter some day—and then I daresay I shall feel just as you've felt. It seems so natural, somehow—now that you've explained it."

"Does it? Does it seem natural to you? Are you sure you understand?" Mrs. Lauderdale looked up anxiously.

"Of course I understand!" answered Katharine, reassuring her. "You've always been the most beautiful woman everywhere, and just for a little

while you thought you weren't, because you were tired and not looking well. You remember how tired you used to be last winter, mother, when you were working so hard and then dancing every night, into the bargain. It was no wonder! But you are, you know — you're quite the most beautiful creature I ever saw, and you always will be."

Yet Katharine in her heart, though she was comforting her mother and really helping her with every word she said, was by no means sure that she quite understood it all. At least, it was very strange to her, being altogether foreign to her own nature. With all his faults, her father had scarcely a trace of personal vanity, and she had inherited much of her character from him. The absence of avarice, as a mainspring which directed his life, and the presence of a certain delicacy of human feeling, together with a good share of her mother's wit, were the chief causes of the wide difference between her and Alexander. It was hard for one so very proud and so little vain to understand how, in her mother, vanity could so easily have driven pride out. Yet she did her best to imagine herself in a like position, and was quite willing to believe that she might have acted in the same way.

"Thank you, dear child," said Mrs. Lauderdale, simply. "I don't know why I've told you all this just this morning. I've been trying to for a long

time. But I hadn't the courage, I suppose. And now — somehow — we're more alone in the world than we were, since the dear old uncle has gone — and we shall be more to each other. I feel it. I don't know whether you do."

"Yes — I do." And Katharine's thoughts again went back to that strange death-scene in the night, in the white room with the soft, warm light. "We shall miss him more, by and by. He was a very live man. Do you know what I mean? Whatever one did, one always felt that he was there. It wasn't because he was so rich — though, of course, we all have had the sensation of a great power behind us — a sort of overwhelming reserve against fate, don't you know? But it really wasn't that. He was such a man! Do you know? I can't fancy that uncle Robert ever did a bad thing in his life. I don't mean starchy, stodgy goodness. He swore at papa most tremendously yesterday — only yesterday — just think!" She paused a moment sadly. "No," she continued, "I don't mean that. He always seemed to go straight when every one else went crooked — straight to the end, as well as he could. Oh, mother — I saw him die, you know! I didn't know death was like that!"

"It must have been dreadful for you, poor child — "

"Dreadful? No — it was strange — a sort of awe. He looked so grand, lying there amidst the

white velvet! I see it now, but I didn't think of it then — the picture comes back — ”

“ Yes — I've seen him,” said Mrs. Lauderdale, softly. “ His face is beautiful now.”

“ It wasn't beautiful then — it was something else — I don't know. I felt that the greatest thing in the world was happening — the great thing that happens to us all some day. I didn't feel that he was dying exactly — nor that I should never hear him speak again after those last words.”

“ What did he say?” asked Mrs. Lauderdale. “ No,” she added, contradicting herself quickly. “ If it's anything like a secret, I don't want to know.”

“ It wasn't. He looked at me very strangely, and then he said, quite loud, ‘ Domine quo vadis?’ ”

“ Lord, whither goest Thou,” said Mrs. Lauderdale, translating the familiar words to herself. “ Did you say anything?”

“ I answered, ‘ Tendit ad astra.’ We had both said the same things once before, some time ago. He heard me, and then he died — that was all.”

At this point some one knocked at the door. Mrs. Lauderdale rose and went to see who was there. Leek, the butler, clad in deep mourning already, stood outside. There was a puzzled look in his face.

“ If you please, Mrs. Lauderdale, I don't know what to do, and I'd wish for your orders — ”

"Yes — what is it?"

"There's Mr. Crowdie downstairs, madam, wanting the picture of Miss Lauderdale that he brought yesterday for poor Mr. Lauderdale, and desirin' to remove it. But the impression downstairs seems to be that Mr. Crowdie presented it to poor Mr. Lauderdale yesterday, in which case it appears to me, madam, to be part of poor Mr. Lauderdale's belongings."

"Oh! Well — wait a minute, please. I'll ask my daughter if she knows anything about it."

Mrs. Lauderdale re-entered the room.

"I heard what he was saying," said Katharine, before her mother could speak. "He distinctly said he gave the picture to uncle Robert. I was there when he brought it. Isn't that just like them — coming to get what they can when he's hardly dead!"

"Yes — but what shall we do?"

"I don't care. He'll give it to Hester, as he meant to do at first. Let him take it."

Mrs. Lauderdale went to the door again.

"Let Mr. Crowdie have his picture, Leek. I'll be responsible."

"Very good, madam."

CHAPTER XV.

THE death of Robert Lauderdale was the news of the day, and produced a profound impression everywhere. Even the city put on, here and there, an outward token of mourning, for on every building of the many which had belonged to him, the flag, if it were flying, was half-masted. New York is a city of many flags, and the eye is accustomed to attach meaning to their position.

And people spoke with respect of the dead man, which rarely happens when the very rich are suddenly gone. He had done well with his money, and every one said so. He had been more charitable than many had guessed until those who had been helped by him began to bemoan their loss. Stories went about of his having known, personally and by name, such men as the conductors on the Elevated Road, and of his having visited them in their homes — them and many others. His death made no difference to any one in Wall Street, and every one in Wall Street was therefore prepared to praise him.

Forthwith began the speculation and gossip in regard to the will. John Ralston heard much of

it, and he observed a curious tendency amongst the men at the bank to treat him with greater deference than usual.

The Ralstons had been informed of the final catastrophe early in the morning. John had immediately gone to Robert Lauderdale's house, rather to enquire about Katharine's condition than for any other purpose, and had thence proceeded down town. There was no reason why he should not go to the bank as usual, he thought. The dead man had only been his great-uncle, and he had determined to make Mr. Beman change his mind, and to counteract the influence of Alexander Junior. The best way to do this was to go to work as though nothing had happened. Before he had been half an hour at his desk, his friend Hamilton Bright, the junior partner in the firm, came up to him.

Hamilton Bright was a sturdy, heavily built man, five and thirty years of age, with a prosperous air — what bankers call ‘a lucky face.’ He was fair as a Saxon, pink and white of complexion, with clear, honest eyes, and quiet, resolute features. In his early youth he had gone to the West, and driven cattle in the Nacimiento Valley, had made some fortunate investments with the small fortune he had inherited, had returned to New York, gone into Beman Brothers’ bank, and in the course of a few years had been taken into

the partnership. He was an extremely normal man. His only peculiarity was a sort of almost fatherly attachment to John Ralston, about which he did not reason. The shadow in his life was his love for Katharine Lauderdale, of which, for John's sake, he had never spoken, but which he was quite unable to conceal.

He came to John's desk and spoke to him in a low voice.

"I say, Jack," he began, "is it true that cousin Katharine has broken her arm?"

"Yes," answered Ralston, bending his black brows. "How did you hear it?"

"It's got about and into the papers. There's a paragraph about it. They say she fell downstairs."

"Some servant told, I suppose, and got a dollar for the item. It's the small bone of her right arm — she was staying with poor uncle Robert, and she had a fall — somehow," added Ralston, vaguely. "She must have been there when he died. It was awfully sudden at the end. I saw him yesterday afternoon. He seemed pretty strong. I went this morning to enquire about cousin Katharine — they say he died very peacefully. Failure of the heart, you know."

Bright nodded thoughtfully, as he leaned one elbow upon Ralston's desk.

"What sort of a will is it going to turn out?" he asked, after a moment's pause.

"I haven't the slightest idea," answered John, with perfect truth.

"It would be a good thing for you if he had died intestate. Your mother and old Alexander are the next of kin. They'd get something in the neighbourhood of thirty or forty millions apiece. You'd give up clerking, Jack."

"I don't know, I'm sure. If I were ever to have much money, a year in a bank wouldn't do me any harm. But I'm not likely to stay here. Cousin Alexander's a good enemy to me. He's been telling Mr. Beman that I drink, and that sort of thing, and Mr. Beman has requested me to leave on the first of the month."

"You don't mean that?" Hamilton Bright's fair Saxon face reddened in sudden anger for his friend.

"Of course I do."

Ralston told him exactly what had happened, and by the time he had finished, Alexander Lauderdale Junior had another enemy, and a dangerous one. Had Bright known all, and especially that Katharine owed her broken arm to her father's violence, something unexpected might have happened. Bright had for Katharine all the Quixotic devotion which a pure and totally unrequited love can inspire in a perfectly simple disposition, which has been brought into rather close contact with the uncompromising code of such a region as the Nacimiento Valley.

"And you wish to stay in the bank?" asked Bright, quietly, at last.

"Yes. And you know very well, Ham, that I'm not as bad as I used to be. I'm going to have a talk with Mr. Beman to-day."

"Don't you bother," answered Bright. "I'll talk to him — now."

Hamilton Bright's broad shoulders swung round, and he went straight to the senior partner's room. Mr. Beman was in his usual seat at his huge desk.

"I want to speak to you about Ralston, Mr. Beman," he said, briefly, laying one of his broad hands upon the shelf of the desk. "You've told him to go on the first of the month, because Mr. Alexander Lauderdale informed you that he drank."

"Yes," answered Mr. Beman, "I have, though I don't know how you heard that it was through Mr. Lauderdale."

"Well — it's a fact, or Ralston wouldn't have said so, in the first place, and I see you admit it. But there isn't a word of truth in the story. Ralston gave up wine altogether last winter."

"Do you mean to say that Mr. Lauderdale has told me — a deliberate falsehood, Mr. Bright?" asked the old banker.

"Yes."

Now Mr. Beman had a very high opinion of Hamilton Bright, but he looked long and earnestly

into the clear blue eyes before he made up his mind what to say.

"I'd not considered the affair as of any importance," he said, at last. "But you've made it very serious. Mr. Lauderdale is Ralston's cousin, and might be supposed to know what he was talking about."

"Yes. That doesn't make it any better for him," observed Bright. "I know what I'm talking about, too. Mr. Lauderdale is a sort of cousin of mine, and I know them all pretty well. I haven't much opinion of Mr. Lauderdale, myself."

Again Mr. Beman stared and met the calm blue eyes. He recalled Alexander Junior's steely grey ones, and did not prefer them. But he said nothing. Bright continued.

"If you can get him to come here, Mr. Beman, I'd like to repeat what I've said in his presence. He's a liar, he's a sneak, and I'm inclined to think he's a scoundrel, though I wouldn't say more."

But in this Bright did Alexander Junior an injustice. Mr. Beman, however, had not survived fifty years of banking in New York without knowing that just such men as Alexander are sometimes wrecked, morally and financially, after having inspired confidence for half a lifetime.

"You use pretty strong language, Mr. Bright. I've known Mr. Lauderdale a long time, but not intimately, though I've always considered him a

valuable friend in business relations. I shall certainly not countenance any such proceedings as calling him to account for what he said. But if you are sure of Ralston, Mr. Bright, please ask him to step here for a moment. We'll keep him. Not that he's likely to stay long," added Mr. Beman, with a smile. "His mother and Mr. Lauderdale's father are next of kin to Mr. Robert Lauderdale, who died this morning, I'm told. I should certainly not wish to do an injustice to any near relation of my old acquaintance."

Hamilton Bright, who rarely wasted words, merely nodded and left the room. He went immediately to Ralston again.

"It's all right, Jack," he said. "Mr. Beman wants you to stay, and wants to tell you so. Go right in."

"Thank you, Ham," said Ralston, rising.

A moment later he was standing before Mr. Beman. The old gentleman looked up over his glasses.

"Mr. Ralston," he said, "I've reason to believe that I was hasty yesterday. I understand that my friend was mistaken in what he said of you. I regret what I said myself. I shall be very glad if you'll stay with us. I learn from other sources that you're very attentive to your work, and I must say — Mr. Ralston —" he smiled pleasantly — "it will be just as well for you to know something

about our business, considering the position — the enviable position — which you'll probably some day occupy."

John Ralston, the son of one of the next of kin, was not quite the same person as Jack Ralston, the grand-nephew of a millionaire.

"I don't know what position I'm to occupy," he answered. "But I'm very glad to stay with you, Mr. Beman — and I'm much obliged to you for doing me this justice."

"Not at all, not at all. I should be very sorry to do any one an injustice — especially a near relation of my old and valued acquaintance, Mr. Robert Lauderdale."

Thereupon John Ralston withdrew, very well satisfied. He had a sort of premonition to the effect that things were to go better with him. It was clear, at least, that Alexander Junior could not prevail against him, since John had vanquished him twice within twenty-four hours. He wondered whether Alexander were sitting all alone in his office at the Trust Company, nervously tapping the table with his long, smooth fingers, and wondering how soon he was to know the contents of the will.

The morning wore on, and he could almost see in the faces of his fellow-clerks how the impression was growing that he would turn out to be one of the heirs. There was an indescribable some-

thing in their glances, a hardly perceptible change in their manner, of which he was aware in spite of himself. But no news came.

At half past twelve he went out and got his luncheon at Sutherland's, as usual. When he came back, he found a note on his desk from his mother. He opened it in considerable excitement, for he could not deny that he hoped a very large share of the inheritance might come to Mrs. Ralston, if not to himself. But the note contained no final news. Mrs. Ralston said that, considering the enormous value of the estate, the lawyers desired to make the will public as soon as possible—a common measure in such cases, as the sudden demise of very rich men has a tendency to affect public confidence, until it is known who is to have the principal control of the fortune. Mrs. Ralston said that only she herself and old Mr. Alexander Lauderdale, as being the two next of kin, had been requested to hear the will read that afternoon. She advised him to come home and wait for her, as early as he could conveniently leave the bank.

That was all, and he had to possess his soul in patience during several hours more. His mother had not yet seen Katharine, and did not mention her. It was impossible to foresee what she would do, but it was clear enough that she would not, and could not, return to her father's house at once.

Before the afternoon was far advanced, the wis-

dom of the lawyers' advice about the reading of the will became apparent. Rumours were afloat that the whole fortune was to go to old Alexander, and rumour further stated that he was in his dotage, and would be capable of selling miles of real estate to found a refuge for escaped lunatics. Serious persons gave no credit to such talk, of course, but any one acquainted with New York knows how little, at a given moment, may upset the market and cause disaster. The reason of this appears to be that there are more undertakings unfinished yet, or just begun, in America, than there are elsewhere, which depend for their success altogether upon a period of comparative calm in financial affairs. To check them, though they might turn out well, is often to kill them, which means ruin to those who have backed them at the beginning.

But matters proceeded rapidly. Before Ralston left the bank, the newsboys were crying the evening papers, containing, as they avowed, 'the extraordinary will of Robert Lauderdale.' In five minutes every one in the bank had read the statement.

There was a paragraph in which, after giving the reasons for making the will public at once, its principal conditions were named. John, who knew nothing of what Katharine had heard, was neither surprised nor disappointed. The paragraph had evidently been written by one of the

lawyers, and sent to all the papers for publication, and there was no account of any interview with any of the heirs. It was a plain account, as far as was possible.

Mr. Robert Lauderdale, it said, had never married; but he had numerous relations, who were all descended from the original Alexander Lauderdale, the grandfather of the deceased. In order to avoid all possible litigation after his death, Mr. Lauderdale had left his fortune as though it had been left by his grandfather, regularly distributed amongst all the heirs of the primeval Alexander, with no legacies whatsoever, excepting certain annuities to be bought of an insurance company before the distribution, for the benefit of the servants in his employ at the time of his death. The will, said the paragraph, bore a very recent date, and had been drawn up, strange to say, by a young lawyer of no particular standing. The names of the witnesses were also given, and, oddly enough, they were persons quite unknown to any one concerned. The paragraph went on to say that it was presumed that the will would not be contested by any one, and would be promptly admitted to probate. A list of the heirs followed. They were: Alexander Lauderdale Senior, Alexander Lauderdale Junior, Mrs. Benjamin Slayback, Robert Lauderdale Slayback, her infant son, Miss Katharine Lauderdale, Mrs. Admiral Ralston, John Ralston, Mrs.

Richard Bright, Hamilton Bright, Mrs. Walter Crowdie. In all, there were ten living persons. The property was to be divided precisely as though the primeval Alexander had left it to his two sons, and as though they, in turn, had divided it amongst their children, down to the youngest living heir, who was Benjamin Slayback's baby boy.

John Ralston pored over the paragraph till he knew it by heart. Then, as soon as he proceeded to apply the terms to actual circumstances, he saw that one-half of the whole fortune must go to Hamilton Bright, his mother, and his sister, Hester Crowdie. Of the remaining half, he and his mother would have half between them, or a quarter of the whole. The smallest share would go to those who actually bore the name of Lauderdale, for only the last quarter would remain to be distributed between the two Alexanders, Charlotte, Katharine, and Charlotte's child. Robert Lauderdale had thus provided a little more liberally for Katharine and himself than for most of the members of the family, since they were to have, ultimately, more than a quarter of the whole. And Alexander Junior would get one of the smallest shares. But it seemed strange that the Brights should have so much, though it was just possible that the old gentleman might have thought it wise to place a large share in the hands of a

trained man of business who would keep it together.

On his side, Hamilton Bright had made the same calculations, and was as near to losing his head with delight as his calm nature made possible. He came up to Jack, and proposed that they should walk up town together and discuss matters.

"I can't," answered Ralston. "I'll go a bit of the way on foot, but my mother wants to see me as soon as possible."

They went out, followed by the envious eyes of many who had read the paragraphs. In a few days they were both to have millions.

"Well," said Ralston, when they were together on the pavement of Broad Street, "it's a queer will, isn't it? I suppose we ought to congratulate each other."

"Wait till it's all settled," answered Bright, cautiously. "Not that there's going to be any difficulty, as far as I can see," he added. "It seems to be all right, and properly witnessed."

"Oh — it's all right enough. But if Alexander Junior can fight it, he will. He's come out worse than he expected. The only odd thing, to my mind, is the name of the lawyer. Who is George W. Russell, anyway? Did you ever hear of him?"

"Oh, yes — I know who he is. He's a young chap who's lately set up for himself — real estate. I think I heard of his doing some work for uncle

Robert last year. He's all right. And he'd be careful about the witnessing and all that."

"Yes — well — but why did uncle Robert go to him? Why didn't he employ his own lawyer — his regular one, I mean — or Henry Brett, or somebody one's heard of? I should think it would be more natural."

"Probably he had made another will before, and didn't like to tell his own lawyer that he was making a new one. I've heard it said that old men are queer about that. They don't want any one to know that they've changed their minds. When they do, they're capable of going to any shyster to get the papers drawn up. That's probably what uncle Robert did."

"It's a very just will in principle," said Ralston. "I don't know what it will turn out in practice. I wonder what the estate is really worth."

"Over eighty millions, anyhow. I know that, because Mr. Beman said he had reason to be sure of it some time ago."

"That gives us two twenty and you forty amongst you three. You didn't expect all that, Ham."

"Expect it! I didn't expect anything. The old gentleman never said a word to me about it. Of course you were in a different position, your mother being next of kin with old Alexander. But if Alexander Junior broke the will — he can't

though, I'm certain—I shouldn't get anything. Of course—I think any will's just that gives me a lot of money. And if Alexander fights, I'll fight, too."

"He will, if he has an inch of ground to stand on. By the bye, if all goes smoothly, I suppose you'll retire from business, and I shall stop clerk-ing, and Crowdie will give up painting."

"I don't know," answered Bright. "As for me, I think I shall stick to the bank. There'll be more interest in the thing when I've got a lot of money in it. Crowdie? Oh—he'll go on paint-ing as long as he can see. He likes it—and it isn't hard work."

They talked a little longer in the same strain, and then Ralston left his friend and went up town by the Elevated, pondering deeply on the situation. One thing seemed clear enough. However matters turned out, whether Alexander Junior fought the will or not, Ralston and Katharine would be free to declare their marriage as soon as they pleased. That consideration outweighed all others with him at the present moment, for he was tired of waiting. It was four months since he had been married, and in that time he had seldom had an opportunity of talking freely with his wife. The perpetual strain of secrecy was wearing upon his nervous nature. He would at any time have preferred to fight any one or anything, rather than have any-

thing to conceal, and concealment had been forced upon him as a daily necessity.

He said to himself with truth that he might as well have struck Alexander for one reason as for another; that he might just as well have faced him about the marriage as about the calumny upon his own character which Alexander had uttered. But circumstances had been against his doing so. At no moment yet, until the present, had he felt himself quite free to take Katharine from her home and to bring her to his mother's. Alexander's own violence had made it possible. And he had intended, or he and his mother had agreed, to take the step at once, when suddenly Robert Lauderdale's death had arrested everything. There were fifty reasons for not declaring the marriage now, or for several weeks to come — chief of all, perhaps, the mere question of good taste. To declare a marriage on the very morrow of a death in the family would surprise people; the world would find it easy to believe that the young couple had acted contrary to Robert Lauderdale's wishes, and had waited for his death, in fear of losing any part of the inheritance by offending him. Such haste would not be decent.

But there would be no need to wait long, John thought, and in the meantime Katharine could surely not go back to Clinton Place.

Wherever else she might be, he should have

plenty of opportunities of seeing her at his leisure. He reached his home and found his mother waiting for him in his study. She was pale and looked tired.

"I suppose you've heard?" she said, interrogatively, as he entered. "I see it's in all the papers."

"Yes," answered John, gravely. "I've been talking with Ham Bright—we left the bank together."

"I suppose he's in the seventh heaven," said Mrs. Ralston. "Who would ever have expected such a will?"

"I'm sure I didn't. May I smoke, mother? I haven't had a chance all day."

"Of course—always smoke. I like it. Jack—I've been there most of the day, you know. I went in twice to look at him. What a grand old man he was! I wish you could see him lying there on white velvet like an old king."

"I don't like to see dead people," answered Ralston, lighting a cigar. "Besides—I was fond of him."

"So was I. Don't think I wasn't, my dear—very fond of him. But you and I don't look at those things just in the same way, I know. I wish I could see them as you do—dream of something beyond, as you do. To me—feeling that it's all over, and that he is there, dead on his bed, and

nowhere else, all there is of him now, or ever will be — well, I was glad to see him as I did. I shall always remember him as I saw him to-day. I wish I believed something. To me — the only hope is the hope of memory for good things and forgetfulness for bad things, as long as life lasts. I've got another good memory of a good man I was fond of — so I've got something."

"It's a depressing sort of creed," said Ralston, smoking thoughtfully. "Not that mine's worth much, I suppose. Still — "

He let the word imply what it might, and puffed slowly at his cigar. Mrs. Ralston passed her hand over her eyes, and said nothing in answer.

"I don't care!" exclaimed John, suddenly. "I can't believe it all ends here. I can't, and I won't. There's something — somewhere, I dare-say I shall never get it, but there's something. I know it, because I feel there is. It's in me, and you, and everybody."

Mrs. Ralston smiled sadly. She had heard her husband triumphantly refute the ontological argument many a time.

"I wish I felt it in me, then," she answered, sincerely. "Jack — isn't there something strange about this will, though? An unknown lawyer, servants for witnesses — all that, as though it had been done in a hurry. It seems odd to me."

"Yes. Bright and I were talking about it."

He went on to tell her what Bright thought.

"He says he knows the lawyer, though," he concluded, "and that he's a straight man, so it must be all right."

"Mr. Allen said he'd only heard his name mentioned once or twice lately," said Mrs. Ralston. "It was a long, long will. Then every servant was mentioned by name. I had no idea there could be so many in the house."

"Who are the witnesses?" asked John.

"One was the secretary — you know? That nice young fellow who used to be about. I don't know who the others were — I've forgotten their names. Mr. Allen didn't seem to think there'd be any difficulty about finding them. He thought the property was all in this State — most of it's in the city, so that the will could be proved immediately."

"Well — I hope so. But I believe there'll be some trouble. Alexander only comes in for a small share. He'll do his best to break the will, so as to get the money divided between his father and you. The Brights would get nothing, in that case. We should get a lot more, of course — but then — I can't realize what twenty millions mean, can you? What difference will it make in our lives, whether we have twenty or forty? Those sums are mythological, anyhow. The more a man has, above ten millions, the more care and bother and worry and enemies he's got for the rest of his life."

"I'm glad to hear you talk in that way, Jack," said Mrs. Ralston. "It's just my feeling. But it's not everybody who thinks so. Most men—well, you know!"

"I think you're mistaken there, mother," answered Ralston. "I'm talking of private individuals, of course—not of men who are in big things, like railways, or banks—but just private persons who want to live on their income and enjoy themselves, and who haven't enormous families, of course. No reasonable being can spend more than five hundred thousand a year without trouble—at least, I don't think so. Uncle Robert didn't actually spend three hundred thousand, I've heard it said. He cared for nothing but white velvet and horses—of all things to go together! Of course he gave away a million a year or so. But that doesn't count as expenses. All the rest just rolled up, and he had to spend hours and hours every day in taking care of it. Now, I just ask you, what possible satisfaction can there be in that? And everybody thinks just the same who's not a born idiot—or a financier. Now Bright—he's different. He's a partner in Beman's and finance amuses him. He'd like to be the Astors and the Vanderbilts and the Rothschilds and all the rest of them, rolled into one. He'd like to ride Wall Street like a pony and direct millions, as he owns cattle out in the Nacimiento Valley. I

wouldn't, for my part. Twenty thousand a year has always seemed wealth to me, though most people one knows say one can't more than live on it. Did you see Katharine, mother?"

"Of course. We had a long talk."

"You didn't tell her anything, I suppose? I mean, what we were talking about last night?"

"No. I thought you'd rather tell her that you'd told me. Besides—just now! But she can't stay there, Jack. It's rather a ghastly situation—alone in the house with the dead man, and only the servants. That nurse has stayed, though, to take care of her arm. But it's grim—all the shades down, and every one talking in whispers. She was in one of the back rooms, so that she could have the window open."

"Oh—she was up, then, was she? Dressed, and all that?"

"Yes—it's the small bone of the arm. She won't have to stay in bed. You can go and see her if you like. That is, if she's still there. I advised her to go and stay with the Crowdies. She looked at me as though she wondered whether I knew anything. I suppose she expected that I'd advise her to go home. But that's impossible."

"Of course—but she hates Crowdie. We all do, for that matter. I don't believe she'll go. Didn't she say?"

"No. Why do we all hate Crowdie? We do — it's quite true. By the bye, he's distinguished himself to-day. You know that picture of Katharine?"

"Yes — he gave it to poor uncle Robert only yesterday."

"Well — he came and took it away this morning before ten o'clock. Katharine told me." Mrs. Ralston laughed without smiling.

"Upon my word! But it's rather curious, though. I didn't know he was mean. He never seemed to be, somehow."

"No — I know. It struck me as strange, too. A new light on his character."

"I fancy he has some object. I hate him — I loathe him! But that isn't like him. I wonder whether Hester was angry because he gave it away. It was for her, you know, and she may not have liked his giving it away. I'll go and see Katharine. Was it late when you left there?"

"About half past four. I stayed with her a long time after the lawyer had gone."

"Mother," said Ralston, suddenly, "why can't we just face it out and bring her here? Would it look too strange, do you think?"

"Yes. People would say we'd waited for poor uncle Robert to die. You must have a little more patience, dear boy."

"That's just what I thought at first," answered

Ralston. "I'll go and see her. If she hadn't left at half past four, I don't believe she'll leave to-day. When is the funeral to be?"

"Day after to-morrow, I think."

END OF VOL. I.